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The prayers of St. Paul

THE

PRAYERS OF ST. PAUL:

BEING AN

ANALYSIS AND EXPOSITION

OF THE

DEVOTIONAL PORTION OF THE APOSTLE'S WRITINGS.

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INTRODUCTORY.

I. ST. PAUL'S SPIRIT OF PRAYER.

II. ANALYSIS.

I.

ST. PAUL'S SPIRIT OF PRAYER.

WHEN St. Paul found it necessary to impress a seal of authentication upon his letters, the sign which he chose was an autograph Benediction. "So I write," he said; and the reader witnessed his peculiar marks on the parchment. But "the token in every Epistle" was not simply the marks that defied the forger: those singular characters shaped a prayer in which was prominent the word GRACE (ΧΑΡΙΣ), the watchword of the Apostle's theology. His peculiar handwriting was his sign-manual; but only as containing an invocation of grace. 2 Thess. iii. 17.

To his own generation, and to some generations that followed, this indispensable seal of genuineness served its purpose. We have not now the same evidence, nor the same need of it. To us there are very many other most obvious tokens of the Apostle's hand. Not to speak of the breath of inspiration that pervades the Epistles that bear his name, they are full of those specific touches of individuality concerning each of which he might also have said, So I write. The same style of theological thought, whether contemplative or dialectic; the same method of exhibiting the facts of redemption, "my gospel;" the same unmistakable characteristics of phrase and construction; the same wonderful blending of the external and objective truth with his own internal and subjective experience; the same light and shade, stronger than in any other writer, produced by his ever-varying fluctuations of feeling;—all these mark out the writings of 2 Tim. ii. 8.

St. Paul from the rest of the Bible, just as the Bible is marked out from all other books. Weighty and powerful in every other sense, his Epistles are especially so in their self-attestation.

Yet it remains true, in a certain sense, that the Apostle's prayer, though not his autograph prayer, is still his token in every Epistle. No peculiarity is more deeply impressed upon his writings than the abundance of their expressions of devotion. Whether we think of the diffused spirit, or the occasional utterance, it is alike true that the element of prayer reigns in them. Either as doxology or as benediction, as praise or as supplication, as ejaculatory formula, or as studied and full outpouring, as interwoven with the tissue of the teaching or as inlaid upon it,—everywhere, in every letter, and in a manner that has no parallel, prayer stamps its solemn grandeur upon the page. If we except the Book of Psalms, which is expressly the universal Liturgy of the Bible, nothing like it is observed in any other writer of Holy Scripture. So unique and all pervasive is this quality that it may fairly be made prominent as a test of authenticity; the unity into which it gathers the body of the Pauline documents is an evidence that goes far to outweigh all that may be said of the occasional diversities of style. It is, so to speak, a law of the Apostle's composition too specific to be lightly set aside.

This characteristic of St. Paul as a writer may be regarded as bearing witness to his profound personal devotion; and, thus regarded, it throws a rich light upon his character as a convert and servant and imitator of Christ. His prayers may also be viewed as part of his theological teaching, in which his theology adopts its most elevated and sacred vehicle. Or they may be viewed as his own illustrations and expositions of his theory and precept of prayer. A brief consideration of each of these aspects of the subject, and of all combined, will be the

best preparation for the substance of the following Essays.

I. Nothing was further from St. Paul's thought than to delineate his own devotion, or to give posterity an opportunity of tracing in the copiousness and fervour of his devotional language the depth of his communion with God. Yet, with the most entire unconsciousness, he has done this.

The same thing may be said with respect to his character generally. No writer, save David, is so clearly reflected in his own writings as St. Paul. No biographer, of all the multitudes who have attempted it, has ever drawn his portrait as he has undesignedly drawn it for himself. With what few but vivid touches has he depicted the Saul of the days of darkness, wise and yet ignorant, malignant and yet sincere, blameless and yet the chief of sinners! And the convinced and humbled rebel, how sharply is he described: his midday turned into deepest night, his spirit shut up in the prison-house, and all the agony of the smitten body of sin poured out in one exceeding bitter cry, "O wretched man that I am!" And when the revealed Christ has risen upon him in his darkness, and lighted him on his new way of consecration to God, and charity to man, and self-sacrifice for the Gospel, how almost perfectly can we trace in his own words the process by which he died to self, and put on Christ, and won perfection! Every posture and attitude of his soul in his not uncertain career seems imprinted upon the familiar thought of Christendom: not by legions of essays written about him! but by himself and his own words.

We have here, however, to do with the abundance of his prayer, and that especially as attested by his writings. The unstudied tone of the whole—the habit of speech that, like Peter's in another sense, bewrayed him—declares him to have lived, and moved, and had his being in prayer.

Almost every incident of his life recorded by himself is

connected with deep devotion: he is either found praying or left praying by every event. The first breath of his new life, its first pulsation after his death to sin, was prayer: and such prayer as his new Master was well pleased to witness. The Lord had heard this young devotee pray before. After the manner of his nation he had worshipped God with all sincerity; for, as he told Timothy at the end of his life, he had learnt to serve God from his forefathers. At the feet of Gamaliel, he had been disciplined in the whole ritual of a devout Jew, of which ample public and private worship was an essential part. He had gone up to the temple at every hour of prayer, and on his housetop or under his fig-tree the same Eye that saw Cornelius and Nathanael had often seen Saul. But the supplication with groanings unutterable which the Saviour heard, and as yet answered not, was the beginning of a new devotion.

Acts ix. 11. "Behold, he prayeth!" And why did the Saviour, who silently heard this new cry, utter this wonderful comment upon it? Was it because the supplication was uttered to Himself? Doubtless the troubled penitent did address his appeal to that vanished Vision; but it was not for that. Nor was it to give Ananias assurance that the enemy of Christianity was now subdued, and devout, and accessible. But it was to mark that deep and unspeakable ecstasy of pleading which is always in God's dealings allied with special Divine visitations, which the Saviour had sanctified by His own supreme pattern, and which would henceforward have in this petitioner its most impressive illustration. This was the great beginning, and the Redeemer has given it a memorial for ever. When the convert, with sprinkled conscience and spirit washed, has found freedom of access into the Holiest, he goes no more out. His devotion is constant and always intense. He was in the perfect absorption of prayer when the Saviour came to him in the temple, and gave him his high commission. It was in such a rapture of conscious and intelligent

devotion that the third heaven opened to him, and he heard things not lawful to utter; and whatever other meaning we may assign to the record, it doubtless may be regarded as indicating the familiarity of the Apostle with those innermost mysteries of the kingdom of grace which are not made known to those who ask, which are not always found of those who seek, but which never have resisted those who knock with the desperation of importunate desire. In such prayer as this the vision from Macedonia found him. Thus he waited upon God during the terrors—terrors to all but him—of the shipwreck on the way to Rome.

All this may seem to refer to the life contemplative, the life of tranquil devotion, which, in the midst of labours more abundant, St. Paul lived. But the same habitual communion with God gave the law to his daily labour as an Evangelist and an Apostle. The grace given to him—his office, and function, and trust—was to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ; but no small part of his apostolical life was prayer. He stood in the midst of the world as an interceding priest; uttering one long, fervent, though, alas! fruitless intercession for Israel, and offering up the Gentiles on the altar of his devotion before he won them by the preaching of faith. This was no small part also of the burden of all the churches that rested on him: whatever deduction may be made for sacred rhetoric—though there is no reason for any—always, day and night, unceasingly, his spirit was pleading for the witnessing Church everywhere, and for all, individually, whom he knew in the flesh. He speaks of intercession as one great element of his apostolical power. And in the same spirit of entire dependence upon God and His never-failing direction, he takes every step in his career. He has no occasion, like those of old, to go up and consult a distant oracle; the Lord, whom he served daily and hourly, heard his prayers, and told him what he should do. Daily and hourly: they

read these Epistles very superficially who do not see in them traces of such a sacred familiarity with the Saviour as the Apostles in the Gospels never knew. Every danger threatening the kingdom is, like Hezekiah's letter, "spread before the Lord;" every thorn in the flesh or spirit is carried directly to Him, the only Healer; every blessing is immediately made matter of thanksgiving to Him; the opening of every door of usefulness is sought at His hands, and entered with gratitude for His grace. The Apostle places himself on a level with the humblest Christian labourer in this respect. The Spirit of his inspiration raised him above us his fellows; but the Spirit of his devotion is common to us all. And in his habitual reference of every the slightest movement to the will of God, sought in prayer and never sought in vain, we have one of the noblest examples of prayer without ceasing.

Isaiah xxxvii. 14.

These observations but faintly indicate what every devout reader may soon verify for himself,—the influence of the Apostle's devotion upon every movement of his life. Let any one take the pains to track him through his career in the New Testament with direct reference to this object, and mark the result. Whether we follow the preacher in the Acts, and listen to his public discourses and his private appeals, or take up the Epistles of the teacher, we are always in the presence of a man who is in the Presence of God. "Whose I am, and Whom I serve," is his motto, once uttered by himself, always felt by us: suggesting that more ancient example of mighty supplication, whose watchword was "The Lord of hosts . . . before Whom I stand." It is not that the other writers of Scripture were in a lower sphere. They also lived and moved and had their being in prayer. But the Holy Spirit has not caused them to leave us the same legacy of their example. St. Paul's vocation was to transfer to himself—to an extent far beyond what he intended when he spoke of Apollos and himself as figures—the doctrines and precepts

Acts xxvii. 23.

1 Kings xviii. 15.

that he taught. Though it was his glory to have lost all glorying, and to have died to all self not found in Christ, the Holy Ghost has constrained him to hand down to us the most beautiful and unaffected self-portraiture extant in the world. Though he served "the Lord with all humility of mind,"—let the depth of these words be sounded,—he has given to us in the passages we shall attempt to expound a living embodiment that cannot be surpassed of a devotion universal, all-absorbing, and never weary, ascending to the loftiest heights of aspiration and descending to the lowliest details of daily duty, of a spirit of prayer that shapes and rounds the entire character, clothing it as with a garment.

Acts xx. 19.

II. It is a light thing to say that St. Paul carried his devotion into his theology: everywhere and always in the Spirit of prayer, that Spirit would rest upon him in a double portion when unfolding the mysteries of Christian truth. He shares the common prerogative of the organs of the Holy Ghost: to be taught themselves and to teach others with more than the ordinary measure of the unction of the Holy One. The reverence that impresses its solemnity upon all his writings, down to the least of them, springs from the same source as that which reigns throughout the Word of God; it is a necessity of inspiration. But in this respect also, as in respect to the portraiture of his own character, it is St. Paul's peculiarity to give special tokens, more demonstrative than the others give, of his deep homage to Divine truth. The student cannot but feel sometimes that the secret of his mysterious Christian training betrays itself. When he passed so suddenly from the bondage of the letter to the freedom of the Spirit, from the feet of Gamaliel to the feet of Jesus, he entered into such direct communion with his Heavenly Teacher as must have made theology and devotion one to him in a most preeminent degree. The ancient familiarity which his brethren had enjoyed with the Lord was compensated

to him by a three years' discipline of his own; and the sustained revelations of those silent seasons must have stamped the powers of the other world upon his thought with a deeper impress than the common privilege of faith.

To this we may ascribe one of the most characteristic facts in these documents: the Apostle's habit of appeal to his invisible Master as present with him while he writes. He spreads the parchment as it were before the Lord; and, receiving his inspiration in prayer, in prayer he transmits his Master's revealed will. This, of course, was true of all who were thus moved of the Holy Ghost; but in St. Paul's case there was something very peculiar. He feels, and gives his readers to feel, that the Lord is at his right hand; his Master is appealed to in every variety of adjuration and prayer, and that in a manner and to an extent of which there is no parallel elsewhere. It might be possible to assign this special circumstance to a special cause. This last Apostle, born out of due time, suspected at the first, and more or less suspected to the end, might have felt that he needed to confirm his own words by such constant reference to the sanction of heaven. Nor can there be any doubt that he did thus sometimes appeal from the doubts of men to the only Cæsar, and challenged the loyalty of his fellow Christians by writing as from the very presence-chamber of the Lord. But this is not the only nor is it the best explanation of the fact. The writer as well as the disciple might say, "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me;" the Apostle's life as well as the Christian Paul's was "hid with Christ in God." His reverent appeal was part of his humility; what might seem to be vehement self-assertion was in reality the purest renunciation of self. He was conscious of having received a special grace both as preacher and as teacher. The chief of sinners before his conversion, he was less than the least of all saints afterwards: he yet was conscious of being intrusted with deeper mysteries than were committed to the Apostles

Gal. ii. 20.

Col. iii. 3.

who were in Christ before him. How he was personally kept humbled he has more than once hinted; his humility as a teacher needed only that he should write as in the sanctuary, on bended knees before the Lord.

The greatest of all systematic and polemical theologians is the most obviously devout in spirit and in form. Standing between God and man, he is in his writings, as well as in his preaching, the medium of a revelation that alternates between benediction and doxology. One half of his pages is largely governed by the former; his doctrines being conveyed to the Church as the unfolding of the grace that he supplicates; the other half is largely governed by the latter, all his manifold teachings paying back their tribute of praise to God.

We are thus led to the consideration of St. Paul's more formal prayers as the vehicle of his theology. The thoughtful reader cannot fail to see, it soon becomes to him a familiar fact, that much of the Apostle's deepest and richest teaching assumes the devotional form. What might be termed, if we were speaking of another author, his choice and classical passages are fragments of liturgy inlaid upon the text, or rather complete and finished acts of worship. And this holds good as well of his dogmatic teaching proper as of his method in exhibiting the privileges, prerogatives, and attainments of the Christian's life and hope.

It is but a swift glance that can be taken in these preliminary notes. As the eye ranges through the long series of these Epistles, it marks that without a single exception, from the opening of his commission to the Thessalonians down to its pathetic seal to Timothy, they contain doctrinal statements of great importance in the form of more or less explicit prayer. The never-absent salutations and doxologies, and the stately collects that occur occasionally, are the Apostle's chosen vehicle for the announcement of the highest mystery, that of the Holy Trinity. This doc-

trine is sacred to devotion; devotion is sacred to it. The Holy Spirit moved him to postpone to a later time whatever systematic definition the Church might need; and to confine his own statement, and argument, and proof to the language of devotion. The Three-One God is never named in St. Paul's writings saving as blessing and being blest: and, as these two prerogatives belong alike to God alone, this introduction of the three all-holy Persons is the best demonstration of their Divinity. Similarly the Apostle commends the Godhead of the Saviour and of the Holy Ghost to the Church mainly through the same medium of worship. And that entire department of Christian theology which is based upon the economical relations of the Father, the Incarnate Son, and the Holy Spirit,—a department of theology vitally important,—finds its clearest unfolding in the Ephesian, Colossian, Corinthian prayers. Several of the Epistles contain in their thanksgivings and supplications statements concerning the atonement which are corner-stones in the fabric of St. Paul's theology: witness, especially, the opening passage of the Epistle to the Colossians, where the doctrines of redemption have their noblest and most indispensable text, set, however, to such a melody of praise as seems to anticipate the Apocalypse. The relation of the Old Testament to the New, the ancient mystery revealed in Christ, is treated dogmatically in several passages; but its fullest disclosure is found in the Doxologies, especially that to the Romans, where a reference to the long suppression of the secret, and its solution in the calling of the Gentiles, carries the strain of devotion to the highest pitch. The doctrines of faith, regeneration, Christian perseverance, and entire sanctification, are best studied in the Apostle's prayers. The student may easily verify these remarks; and in doing so he will find how rich an excerpt of what it is the fashion to call Pauline theology may be collected in the form of these devotional sentences.

It is not a matter equally obvious, but it is equally true, that St. Paul somewhere or other in every Epistle, generally at the outset or the close, condenses the essence of the subject he dwells upon into thanksgiving or supplication. The Epistle to the Galatians may seem to be an exception to this, but it really is not so. "God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross!" is essentially the wanting Prayer of the Epistle which gathers up all its meaning. And this leads to another observation, that topics of denunciation or warning are generally—not always, but generally—dealt with in the indirect, but most effectual, method of intercession; while on the other hand, the Apostle's commendations (in which he is far more affluent than in reproofs) are for the most part administered through the medium of thanksgivings to God. Abundant illustrations of this rise to the mind, as it glances along the line of the Epistles from Thessalonians to Titus.

Gal. vi. 14.

Generally speaking, there might seem to be a certain contrariety between theological teaching and the utterance of devotion. But this is not the case in Scripture. It is not so in the highest Prayer known to man—that of the seventeenth chapter of St. John. It is not so in the prayers of the Acts, nor in that of St. Peter's Epistle. Especially it is not so in the series of St. Paul's prayers. They are all of them, from the shortest to the longest, remarkable for nothing more than for their close, rigorous, theological analysis. It is as if St. Paul had set before himself that earliest model given us by our Saviour, which is also the most systematic and symmetrical form of words that could be desired, either for the memory of the child or the deepest thinking of the adult. Symmetry can go no further than he carries it in the great systems of prayer contained in the Ephesian, Philippian, and Corinthian Epistles. If we may so speak, nowhere is the sacred artist more elaborate than in these elevations of his

thought to heaven. They are finished to the highest degree of perfection: the central prayer of all his prayers, that in the heart of the Ephesian Epistle, is literally without a flaw as a compendium of all interior evangelical truth. Hence there is a sense in which an exposition of St. Paul's devotions is comparatively easy. In them we have less of the harsher peculiarities of the writer, fewer of the things hard to be understood; the agitations of polemics are not there; all is the tranquil simplicity of contemplative devotion; eternal truth as it is. The difficulty that remains is of another kind, and to that we must now turn.

However symmetrical and perfect these sentences are as statements of Christian doctrine, it is their exhibition of Christian privilege that has always made them so precious to the devout. As such only they give out all their beauty. This really explains their origin. Whensoever the Apostle approaches the higher Christian life, and the exceeding greatness of the power and promise of God, and the innermost secrets of the provisions of the Christian covenant, we perceive him, as it were, changing his voice: doctrine, precept, exhortation give place to prayer; the pen is laid down, and the sentence finished in ardent praise or intercession, to be afterwards written under the suggestion of the Holy Ghost, just as it left his heart. In some instances—such as the opening prayer to the Colossians and those that abound in the Thessalonian Epistles—the words go off into petition and return again without disturbing the order, only leaving their richer sanctity on the text. In others again—most notably in the middle of the Ephesians—there is an intentional suspension of the theme, and the prayer is as deliberate and set as when the Apostle knelt with the same Ephesians by the sea-shore; as clear and sharply defined as if it had been let into the body of the Epistle; perfect throughout from the bending of the knees and the orderly approach,

down to the final doxology and Amen. His deepest thoughts take refuge in adoration. Not in rhapsody: for, as we have seen, no parts of his writing are so finished in their articulation as these high devotions. They suggest the third heaven to which he had been rapt; but they are not among the things which it was not lawful for him to utter. These prayers are, on the contrary, mighty exhortations. They are indirect but most urgent appeals to those who hear him to seek, in the only way in which they can be found, the highest blessings, and the most perfect victory, and the most abundant peace of the covenant of grace.

These prayers are the crown of the Apostle's writings. They are not, indeed, to be taken as summaries of his doctrine; nor do they, in any sense, represent the entire argumentative, expository, and ethical wealth of his theology. In studying them we do not study the perfect Paul in his integrity, as the masterbuilder of Christian theology. But we have in them the best produce of his mind; the flower and fruit into which the great tree of his Christian divinity here and there burst. The rich sap everywhere, these are the ripe clusters. In such sentences we may be sure that his own great heart found its deepest rest, as in them it expressed its most abounding aspiration. Just as that Greater than Paul utters His perfect soul in the final intercessory prayer, finding there His rest before His sorrow, and anticipating His ascension, so our Apostle rises in these brief intervals of worship out of the common level of his teaching and argument, and enters by anticipation into his rest also.

III. This introduction would be wanting if it did not finally point out how St. Paul's prayers illustrate his theory and doctrine of prayer; and how they yield us suggestions for the material of supplication, as well as models to regulate its spirit. Like his Master, and indeed by His authority, he also teaches us to pray.

The Apostle Paul furnishes the only example of the new method of devotion, after the full doctrine of the Mediator between God and man had been revealed. The few prayers of the Acts of the Apostles contain, indeed, the germ of what St. Paul afterwards developed, but only the germ. He whose function it was first and most fully to set forth theologically the economy of the Christian mediation, has given us the only formulas of perfect Christian prayer in the New Testament. We shall find that, as his doctrine concerning prayer is that we have access to God through the mediation of His Incarnate Son by the suggestion and spiritual ministry of the Holy Ghost, so his own practice is faithful to that doctrine. The object of the formal intercession that he offers in the Church and for the Church is GOD, GOD THE FATHER, THE FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, His most holy name having connected with it such appendages as the burden of the supplication renders appropriate: God of peace, of hope, of patience, of consolation, of all and every grace, severally, according to the aspect of the Divine benignity which the prayer appealed to. But he is careful to obviate the unchristian notion that the three several Persons of the Godhead are not individually to be addressed as fountains of grace and benediction. Reserving the solemn and stately formula of set public devotion, he is free to invoke the name of Jesus, and even represents the company of believers as known by the characteristic of calling upon that Name. As to himself, and as a private Christian, there is ample evidence that, from the time he first saw that Just One, he never ceased to beseech His interposition in every emergency. "I besought the Lord thrice!"

Eph. iii. 14.

2 Cor. xii. 8.

The Apostle's prayers have not been as such incorporated into the liturgies of the churches, however often they enter into the free petitions of unliturgical worship. But the common consent of Christendom has agreed to use

his great Benediction; in the public service of almost all communions it has its place, the New Testament substitute for the ancient Levitical blessing; and the sentences of worship, whether of thanksgiving or of supplication, to which we have referred, have exercised, even though they are not directly quoted, their marked influence upon the public worship of the Church from the beginning.

There is danger, however, of our forgetting that St. Paul did not indite these prayers as part of his official function, but that they were actually his own most earnest and real intercessions. They are not the illustrations of style merely, nor marks of a habit that he had contracted. They were tokens, rather they are tokens, of his firm faith in the virtue of mutual intercessory prayer. Even his usual apostolical benedictions are not sacred utterances in the name of the Lord; they are prayers for the Divine grace, mercy, and peace. And those more copious outpourings of his desire for the churches were pleadings that he personally offered before God, as he said, day and night. They were his actual petitions, with which he besieged heaven constantly. They ceased to be his supplications when he ceased to live; for the prayers of Paul, like the prayers of David, and every other mortal that departs hence, ARE ENDED. But they remain to show us what intercessory prayer should be. Ps. lxxii. 20.

Let it be remembered that he is not more earnest in praying for others than he is earnest in desiring others to pray for him. He never prays as an Apostle, always as a Christian man; and as such depends on the response of others' prayer. "Brethren, pray for us!" has an infinite force when we remember this. But he who has such boundless faith in the efficacy of the mutual intercession of perfect charity among fellow Christians upon earth, keeps the most absolute silence as to the interchange of prayers between the living and the dead; and this silence is the

most effectual reproof by anticipation of a great error. St. Paul prays for the churches and for Timothy down to the very last; but, when he is about to depart, and seems to be looking back already as from another world upon his son left to fight the good fight alone, he does not say: "I will not cease to pray for thee!" Sometimes he dwells on the communion of the two worlds in a strain that would have required him to tell us if that communion had included mutual intercession. But, by how much the more rigidly he excludes the petitions of heaven for earth, so much the more diligently does he teach the efficacy and strength of the Saviour's "Father, I will," on behalf of his fellow Christians and the kingdom of God. The profound mystery of this direct influence of our requests on the counsels of heaven none felt more deeply than St. Paul, the theologian of all the mysteries. But he prays like a little child himself, and so teaches us to pray.

John xvii. 24.

Finally, we must return to a point touched lightly in passing. In yet another sense these prayers teach us how to pray; they teach us how large, yea, how boundless, is the charter that is the directory and the warrant of personal supplication. Whatsoever we find written in these utterances of his desire for us was written for our encouragement, for the encouragement of every one. St. Paul does not sketch in these forms of sound words an ideal perfection, to be hoped for not in time, but in eternity: a victory, purity, and peace that passeth attainment as it passeth understanding. These heights of rest in God are not a sphere where all the unrealised aspirations and desires of regenerate man find their vanishing points at an infinite distance. Whatsoever he prays for as the heritage of believers on earth, every believer may claim. All may attain these higher blessings, and the more fervent prayers that reach them are not commended to any class or order. There is no hierarchy in the kingdom of grace, save what is created

by degrees of earnestness in the prayer of faith. These passages of St. Paul's writings must be approached without any notion of their being transcendental or pious hyperboles, without any notion of their being the portion of an elect order of saints; like the Lord's Prayer, they are meant for the Christian's every-day life. But, if they are so regarded, they cannot fail to quicken devotion, and to raise and to enlarge our views of what true religion is. If the spiritual state be vigorous, they serve to guide and direct the healthy desires of the soul. If it be languid, they serve to invigorate its failing energy. There cannot be a more useful discipline than the prayerful study of these prayers.

II.

ANALYSIS.

HAVING given a general view of the devotional element that pervades St. Paul's writings, it will be further necessary for our purpose to sketch an analytical outline of its various forms of expression. This is a task as practicable as it is interesting.

To reduce to system such utterances as these, in which the free Spirit breathes His influence as He listeth, might seem a thing impossible. But it is far otherwise. The Apostle prays with the understanding, in every sense of the word; a high and sure theory always guides his practice; and the same tranquil order that is impressed upon his dogmatic teaching is almost equally apparent in his acts and formulas of worship. Here, as everywhere in Holy Writ, freedom has its own bonds, and there is a law of liberty; from the set and familiar phrases that never vary, up to those outbursts which almost lose their hold on language, the Apostle's devotions are governed by the fixed rules of Christian prayer; uniting what, in the language of the Mystics, is the prayer of Meditation and the prayer of Contemplation. He preserves uniformly a method and a proportion in his teaching; and this department of it presents no exception. We may formally arrange the whole compass of his inspired communications. Whatever unutterable things he may in his ecstasy have sometimes meditated before God find no record in these Epistles: in them he is never vibrating between in the body and out of the body; never for an

instant elevated to a point where his spirit is not subject to himself, and his speech not amenable to law. It is only rhapsody that defies analysis, and there is no rhapsody here. However distasteful the idea may at first seem, there is no sentence which does not enter and take its place in a classification that will prove all the more perfect the more perfectly it is wrought out.

But the idea ought not to be distasteful. There is no contradiction between high devotion and perfect order; witness the profoundest portions of the Old Testament and of the New. And it is not proposed to isolate these passages, so as to study them apart from their place in Scripture. That would indeed be a fatal error at the outset. However possible it may be without violence to insert doctrinal texts into theological systems, this can seldom be the case with those utterances of devotion that are born of the occasion, and owe much of their force to the context. They must be studied and examined before they are translated, and to a great extent independently of any formal doctrine. They will never be so beautiful or full of meaning as in their own place. But, this being undeniable, it is equally true that a large and comprehensive view of the Apostle's devotional teaching will tend to exalt our conception of its grandeur as a whole, and sometimes throw a very important light upon its individual passages. Moreover, such a general glance is essential to our present object.

What classification, then, shall we adopt? It would help us if we could take as our guide any extant record of St. Paul's manner of conducting the religious service of a Christian assembly. But there is none to be found, and we are left to our imagination. He would doubtless begin by invoking the benediction of the God of grace through Jesus Christ; he would present his thanksgivings and praises for the common salvation and the Christian history of this particular church; he would offer general

prayers for the sanctification and religious prosperity of the saints; he would then enlarge in specific petitions and intercessions; and crown all by offering, on the part of the worshipping assembly, a full doxology in the name of the Redeemer. Now if we apply this theory of the Apostle's supposed order of worship to his writings, as composing one great liturgy, embedded in a series of theological documents, we shall find that they submit to the classification almost without a difficulty or a flaw. We have first the familiar formulas of invocation that always begin and end with prayer for grace and peace; then a series of eucharistical acknowledgments running almost unbroken through the Epistles; we have, further, the entire body of supplications for the perfecting of the saints, various and free and deep and full; amongst these are interspersed a number of less copious but fervent personal requests and intercessions; and, finally, there are many ascriptions of glory in which adoration takes its most reverent and most exalted forms. Let us attempt to distribute under these five heads the rich variety of matter at our disposal.

I. The first class of passages comprises those formulas of Invocation in which the blessing of God is called down upon the people; at the commencement they take the place of Christian Salutations; at the close they are commonly regarded as Benedictions. But they are alike direct prayers to God.

Strictly speaking, Invocation refers to the Being invoked, whether as God, or Lord, or the Father, or the Triune Name. But we have no instance in St. Paul's writings of a direct invocation which is not bound up with the blessing invoked upon those for whom he pleads. Anything like the Redeemer's "Holy Father," or St. Stephen's "Lord Jesus," or the direct invocations of David and Daniel, do not occur. Hence we need not dwell on these as distinct from what follows.

The Greetings that invariably open the Epistles are the salutations, current respectively among the Greeks and the Hebrews, blended into one, raised to a higher meaning, and uttered in the form of invocation from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The two words "grace" and "peace" in their combination signify all that the goodness of God has to bestow, and all that the misery of man can need. Both are sought from the Father, and equally from His Son our Saviour. In one memorable variation of the prayer—that of the Epistle to the Galatians—the redeeming work of Christ is added as the ground on which the supplication is based. In the Pastoral Epistles to Timothy and Titus, mercy separates between the grace and peace which it really unites; and the formula takes its perfect character: "Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father, and Jesus Christ our Lord." Here it is manifest that the Christian salutation is merged and lost—or all but merged and lost—in the supplication for that grace which lies at the basis of the religious life, and is the inspiration and encouragement of all other prayer.

1 Tim. i. 2.

The Benedictions at the close of the Epistles are, like the Greetings at the commencement, variations on one formula, the key-note of which is the same that begins, GRACE. This word here finds its most comprehensive application; it is the source of all salvation in Christ, it is the spring of all good in the Christian, and it goes back to its source in thanksgiving,—the same word receiving progressively these three meanings. No document ever left the Apostle's hand without having this sacred word written in his own characters at the end; and once, in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, the formula swells to its full Trinitarian proportions, and becomes the Benediction that the Church has appropriated for ever: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all."

2 Cor. xiii. 14.

But here it is observable that this is not necessarily a valedictory formula: it is as appropriate at the beginning as at the end. It is an invocation upon the entire Christian life. It is not the specific close of worship, which is, whether on earth or in heaven, Doxology alone.[1] Hence, also, it must be carefully observed that it is not a benediction in the sense of modern and perverted ecclesiastical usage. It is an invocation of the blessing of the Triune God, pronounced in prayer; and not an authoritative act performed in the name of God. Whatever benediction of persons or things may be supposed to belong to ministerial function, in the service of God and in the worship of the Christian congregation, there is only One Priest whose office it is to bless. His prerogative is not shared, even by Apostles. The supreme Benediction of the New Testament is, like its type and original in the ancient temple, a prayer to the Triune God for His Triune blessing.

II. Almost equally uniform is the occurrence of the Thanksgivings in which the Apostle challenges the gratitude of his readers, and presents for them, and with them, due acknowledgments of the great blessing of the Gospel, and of their own particular mercies. Generally, these take the form of simple thanksgiving for Christian benefits; sometimes God is blessed and praised as the Author of these benefits; whilst here and there brief flashes of ejaculatory thanks lighten up the page, in which both meanings are blended in one word.

The outpourings of thankfulness which begin the Epistles have, as a rule, direct reference to the specific Christian history of the people to whom St. Paul writes. Their first object being to express his gratitude, they subordinately tend to conciliate the reader's goodwill. Hence, in his first Epistles, written to the Thessalonians, there is a most remarkable effusion of gratulatory acknowledgments. He seems to regard them as patterns of the

manner in which the Gospel should be received: patterns not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but to all people throughout the world. He sends them, therefore, as it were, the firstfruits of his fervent gratitude, for the success of his labours everywhere and to the end. In the former letter words fail him: "What thanks can we render again unto God for you?" In the latter he is bound, and he repeats this strong word, to give thanks for the growth of their faith. Writing to the Corinthians, his thanksgiving is strikingly adapted to their high standing and prerogatives, as a congregation of Christians endowed with a larger than usual distribution of gifts. Offering up his most solemn oblation of praise for the Romans, he thanks God that the tidings of their faith had spread throughout the whole world: a congratulation as much justified by fact as that more limited one to the Thessalonians. These sent their record forth throughout a province, the Romans throughout the earth. The same exquisite propriety will be seen to mark the phraseology employed to the Philippians, whose steady, continuous perseverance was preeminent among the churches; as also that to the Colossians, and in the minor Epistles. It is illustrated, also, though differently, in the conspicuous absence of thanksgiving in the Epistle to the Galatians.

1 Thess. iii. 9.

These eucharistical ascriptions are always offered directly to God through Jesus Christ: no created being shares them. But in some passages they assume the more explicit form of praise, the Giver being thought of rather than the receiver and the gift. "Blessed be God" is their watchword: it is the language of praise, as distinguished from doxology, in which simple adoration is expressed,—thanksgiving being not lost or forgotten, but swallowed up in worship. There are three cardinal examples of this high praise as occurring at the commencement of the letters. The first is that most striking deviation from rule which is found in the Galatian Epistle. In this exceptional

2 Cor. i. 3.

opening the invocation of the name of Jesus glides into an acknowledgment of His redeeming work, on which again is based a Doxology: the customary thanksgiving for the Galatians, which their unhappy apostasy precluded, seems to be compensated by this more fervent ascription to God. The Second Epistle to the Corinthians furnishes also a remarkable example, as will be more fully seen. But it is the Ephesian Epistle which in this, as in all that pertains to St. Paul's devotion, has the preeminence: invocation, thanksgiving, praise, prayer, doxology, are all most wonderfully blended. The opening ascription of praise is one of the highest of the Apostle's strains; differing from all others in this, that it melts into the ordinary current of the Epistle without any sure and determinate mark of distinction. These two apostolic Benedictions, it may be further observed, are offered to the "God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ;" and it cannot but be felt that St. Peter in the opening of his Epistle has caught the tone of his beloved brother. He adds a third to these beautiful Hymns to the Father.

Eph. i. 3.
1 Pet. i. 3.

Some of these eucharistical passages are remarkable for a certain combination of thanksgiving and prayer that seems peculiar to St. Paul; a combination which is stamped deeply on his precept, and again and again exemplified in his practice. Sometimes the two occur together, as in the natural order of grace: thanksgiving for much being followed by prayer for more. Sometimes the one passes into the other, as in the Epistle to the Ephesians, by an insensible and natural transition. Sometimes, as in those to the Romans and Philemon,—the greatest and the least of the Epistles,—both prayer and thanks unite to subserve a personal object, and exert a specific influence upon the readers. Sometimes, as in the Epistle to the Philippians, the one is as it were the counterpart or counterbalance of the other: the thanksgiving expresses confidence in their final salvation; the prayer comes in to show the warrant

and to prescribe the conditions of that confidence. In more than one of these letters the prayer seems to be St. Paul's practical method of expressing the gratitude which his thanksgiving expressed in words; whilst in some instances, as in the First Epistle to the Thessalonians, his spirit appears to take refuge in supplication from the pressure of an emotion not otherwise to be borne. These are only instances of a general rule. Throughout his writings prayer and praise and thanksgiving, whilst perfectly distinct, yet follow hard one upon another, and blend into indissoluble unity. Hence we include them all under the generic title of "The Prayers of St. Paul."

Before leaving this topic, a glance must be thrown upon the ejaculatory expressions of a spirit in which gratitude is always the uppermost and overflowing emotion. The Apostle chose at the outset as his theological watchword the term grace; and he, more than any other writer, has stamped upon that word, in the Greek original, its widest and its deepest meaning,—grace as the principle in God, as an influence of the Gospel in the regenerate, and as the soul's return of gratitude. In this last meaning it was as dear and as familiar to St. Paul as in the two former. Glory and thanks are notes continually recurring in his Epistles: glory for the more stately doxology, thanks the familiar term for ready service. The spirit of constant gratitude runs through the Apostle's history. Again and again we read of his offering praise in the presence of his brethren. That vigorous saying, "He thanked God, and took courage," might fairly be taken as the watchword of the man and his communications. "I thank God through Jesus Christ!" is the brief and pregnant expression of his infinite debt at the beginning of his Christian career. "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift!" was a tribute to that vast obligation of which every lesser benefit, of money or what else, reminded him. "Thanks be to God, which always causes us to triumph in Christ!"

Acts xxviii. 15.
Rom. vii. 25.
2 Cor. ix. 15.
2 Cor. ii. 14.

was a kind of spontaneous testimony which every token of success evoked, and which escaped his lips, we may be sure, ten thousand times. "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory!" seals and crowns the whole. Other examples are more commonplace, but they show the alacrity of a spirit "ready to every good word." Such are the expression of his thanks that he "baptised none of you but Crispus and Gaius;" that he spake "with tongues more than ye all;" for what was put into "the heart of Titus;" and some other examples that give the Apostle's own illustration of his precept, "In everything give thanks."

1 Cor. xv. 57.
1 Cor. i. 14.
1 Cor. xvi. 18.
2 Cor. viii. 16.
1 Thess. v. 18.

It may be noted, by way of transition to St. Paul's prayers more properly so called, that ejaculatory petition is as characteristic of his writings as ejaculatory gratitude. Scarcely a letter is without instances—some of them very striking ones—of this practice. God is appealed to in the most earnest of all possible adjurations, from the familiar "God forbid!" (not so forcible, however, in the original) up to the solemn "I call God for a record upon my soul!" These formulas of conscientious appeal to God, which help us to understand our Saviour's precept concerning the oath, are never mere expletives, of course; nor are they examples of a habit contracted by the writer, however reverent; they have all the sanctity of prayer, as uttered by one whose testimony concerning his own relation to God was this, "Whose I am, and Whom I serve;" and who remembered to the end of his life, with the sorrow of a forgiven spirit, that he had once been a blasphemer. They all find their justification in the circumstances to which they owe their origin; and some of them, such as the pathetic apostrophe, "I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren!" must be classed among this petitioner's intercessions.

2 Cor. i. 23.
Acts xxvii. 23.
Rom. ix. 3.

III. We now penetrate to the heart and centre of our subject, the series of greater Supplications which, more

than any other department of devotional teaching, is characteristic of St. Paul. In other respects he is imitated by his brethren; or, rather, the form of sound words is common to him and to them; but this collection of prayers is peculiarly his own. Let us briefly note some of their leading common features, and then attempt to exhibit them in their order.

These prayers are offered by the Apostle for the Church, but at the same time they are presented in the midst of the congregation which joins with him in offering them to God. They are not, therefore, strictly speaking, intercessions: the assembly discerned the Spirit's meaning, "After this manner pray ye!" and they made these supplications their own, as if their absent father was leading their devotions. They are notwithstanding all so framed as to be entirely independent of the specific state of any individual community: without a single exception they bear what may be called an impersonal character. Unlike the Thanksgivings, they make no direct reference to the peculiar condition, nor even to the peculiar wants, of the church to which they are addressed: they belong to the General Assembly. Each might be transferred to any other Epistle than that which owns it without giving or receiving any vital injury. It is true that some grace and some point would be here and there lost; but nothing essential to the interpretation. For instance, the opening Prayer in the first of the Thessalonian Epistles is very similar to the final one in the Hebrews: a transposition would not create any violent anomaly in either Epistle, although "the coming of the Lord Jesus" gives the Thessalonian Prayer a peculiar emphasis, and "the blood of the everlasting covenant" has an affecting force at the conclusion of the great sacrificial Epistle.

1 Thess. iii. 13. Heb. xiii. 20.

Another element they have in common: they are all more or less devoted to the grand conception of the perfect, individual, Christian life. The word Perfection is

the seal with which they are all alike stamped, and that ideal which is found in them is to be personally realised. They do not exclude those elements of excellence which belong to the perfection of the community as such: in some of these prayers that idea has, as will be seen, a marked prominence. But the individual life is never excluded. There is nothing for which this assemblage of Collects is more remarkable than the way in which they blend the edification of the Church and the edification of the individual. Whilst we think that we are reading a great intercession for the growth and maturity of the body of Christ, "made perfect in one," we suddenly find, as in the Ephesian Prayer, that the Apostle is giving every one of us, even the feeblest, a petition to inflame his own desire and to point his own aspiration.

John xvii. 23.

Lastly, they are distinct and perfect each in itself, while their full weight of glory is felt only when they are blended into harmony. There is scarcely one of them that might not be made the centre of a system of Christian ethics, or of the charter of Christian privilege. We feel in reading each that it contains the sum of regenerate desire and hope; and that its unqualified fulfilment in the heart and life would place us side by side with Christ in the enjoyment of the inheritance of the sanctified. Each in itself would be in a certain sense a sufficient directory to the attainment of perfect holiness. But yet they both give and receive light and strength, when compared together, and studied in connection.

Considering how much the Apostle was attached to sacred formulas, it is very remarkable that not a clause in the Prayers is ever repeated or reproduced: the Epistles that echo each other in some respects are distinct in this. And yet, if we read them consecutively, we must feel not only that one spirit rules them all, but that they all belong to one common system, in which each is perfect, but their union makes a triple perfection. And now let us verify

our judgment by tracing them through the Apostle's writings in order.

No arrangement possible could be better than the chronological one. Beginning with the two Thessalonian Epistles, we find the supplication to be as abundant as we have seen the thanksgiving to be. There are no less than five distinct Prayers. Charity, the royal grace, the bond of perfectness in heaven and earth, leads the long train: for the first of these Prayers has for its subject THE ABOUNDING OF LOVE in its relation to consummate holiness and the preparation for the day of Christ. Then follows the prayer for ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION, every word and every phrase of which is unique: the believer's triple nature is commended to the faithful God of the Christian vocation, to be entirely consecrated by His grace, and that for ever. In the Second Epistle occurs the beautiful petition for the FULFILMENT OF THE DIVINE GOOD PLEASURE, in the experience of believers, to the mutual glorification of Christ in them and of them in Christ. Scarcely does the echo of this sublime supplication die away when the strain begins again, and the God of everlasting consolation is invoked to bestow the blessing of CHRISTIAN STEADFASTNESS. And, before the Epistle ends, another prayer is offered, of which the PATIENCE OF CHRIST is the burden. These five Thessalonian supplications are marked by certain most striking and never-repeated thoughts and words; and they may be said to form quite a Liturgy of themselves.

1 Thess. iii. 12, 13.

1 Thess. v. 23.

2 Thess. i. 11, 12.

2 Thess. ii. 16, 17.

2 Thess. iii. 5.

Passing over the appeal to the Galatians, in which it might almost seem as if the writer's spirit was too much pressed for formal prayer,—although, as we shall see hereafter, there is one great intercession in it,—we reach the two Epistles to the Corinthians, in the course of which praise and thanksgiving abound almost to the exclusion of supplication. At the close of the second letter there are found the disjointed fragments, as it were, of a petition,

2 Cor. xiii. 9. the theme of which is PERFECT RESTORATION, or, as our translation has it, perfection, thus rendering a word which occurs only here. Then we pass to the great theological Epistle, where the prayers for which we seek occur only at the end: one being for UNITY IN SPIRIT AND WORSHIP, and the other for the CONSUMMATION OF HOPE. These two petitions are in reality one, being divided only by some appropriate quotations of Scripture.

Rom. xv. 6.
Rom. xv. 13.

And now we enter into the sanctuary of St. Paul's writings, the tranquil temple-Epistle, where, as might be expected, praise and prayer rise to their highest pitch. The first petition it is hard to characterise by any one epithet: for the present let us term it THE VISION OF THE CHRISTIAN INHERITANCE, although neither that nor any other phrase can give any hint of its wonderful fulness. Then comes the central Collect in the Apostle's Liturgy, the PRAYER OF THE INDWELLING TRINITY. In every respect this is the highest strain of his devotion: here is its perfection. What John xvii. is to the Gospels, this prayer is to St. Paul's writings. Connecting it with the preceding, we have in these two effusions the loftiest language of human worship not uttered by the Word Himself.

Ephes. i. 15—23.
Ephes. iii. 14—21.

In the Epistle to the Colossians occurs the memorable record of the Apostle's agony on their behalf; that is, of his intense supplication for their FULL ASSURANCE OF UNDERSTANDING. This, however, is preceded by a subdued and altered version of one of the Ephesian prayers, its burden being the FRUITFULNESS OF PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE. These two petitions are, as it were, counterparts, and as such we shall expound them: in the one, the settlement of their minds in the mystery of Christ is the theme of petition; in the other, their wise use of that knowledge in the diligence of daily life. Both these prayers are solemnly connected with the death and resurrection of the Redeemer. In the first chapter of this Epistle supplication and thanksgiving join in the most impressive manner

Col. ii. 1, 2.
Col. i. 10.

around the Cross; prayer asking for insight into the mystery which praise adoringly acknowledges. How precious and how appropriate these prayers are to us in the present times of rebellion against the mysteries of Christ and of God!

Two Supplications remain; and, taking them in their order in the chronology of St. Paul's writings, it might seem as if they were intentionally reserved to the last. In the Philippian Epistle "PERSEVERANCE TO THE DAY OF CHRIST" is the theme. This prayer, as we have seen, is the counterpart of a preceding thanksgiving, and not to be understood save in connection with it. It sums up all the Christian graces, and asks for their perfect growth and consummation unto the great day: the day of Christ, which we have missed in several of the preceding supplications, now coming again at the close, as it was found in the beginning, of the Apostle's devotions. Many think that here St. Paul's Prayers should find their appropriate finish. But it is very difficult, let criticism say what it may, to assign to any other writer the "PRAYER OF THE EVERLASTING COVENANT," containing so affecting a summary of the sacrificial Epistle, with its glorious Doxology, fit close of the whole.

Phil. i 9—11.

Heb. xiii. 20, 21.

Here we have twelve great Liturgical Prayers, and a thirteenth added, which seems written in St. Paul's undeniable handwriting. What a wonderful series of devotional fragments they constitute! And what a perfect whole, when all are contemplated together! These words are the words of a man, and a man of like passions with ourselves: but we know, we feel, while we read, that none could have uttered them unless "moved by the Holy Ghost." They have no parallel but in the sacred Fountain whence they originally flowed, the departing prayer of Jesus. St. Paul must have known that Fountain,—though the Saviour's words were as yet buried deep in the heart of St. John.

2 Peter i. 21.

IV. What in our modern language would be termed Intercessions should now be introduced. But it will be seen, in due course, that in the fullest sense of the term these are presented in the New Testament only by the Mediator. One is our Intercessor, even Christ, and all we are petitioners in common. Prayers, however, which are offered on behalf of others not present, whether desiring those prayers or not desiring them, may be included under this title; and of them we have some striking examples, which must be considered in their order.

Foremost rises in all its unspeakable depth his intercession for his blinded brethren after the flesh, for Israel under temporary reprobation. His intercessions in this behalf are not referred to often, never at any length, but in hints of wonderful pathos. It is in relation to this that we hear him expressing himself in terms that defy translation: the most vehement words he ever uttered, hard to be understood, save by those who have entered into the secret of that infinite self-sacrificing love which made
Rom. ix.3. Moses and St. Paul one. "I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren!" Intercession for country and people and kindred cannot go beyond this. Belonging to the same class, though in a lower sphere, is the Apostle's most earnest pleading for the apostate Christians of Galatia, who, with the Cross set forth evidently before them, had been bewitched into a virtual
Gal. iv.19. abandonment of Christ. "I travail in birth" is the strong expression that bears its record of the Apostle's agony on their behalf, and abides in his Epistle a monument and example of the anxiety with which all Christians should intercede for those who are surrendering the pure Gospel for its semblance. Lastly, we hear the same accents of Christian intercession—blending holy severity with long-suffering tenderness—in the Apostle's prayer for his indi-
2 Tim. iv. 16. vidual opponents. "I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge!" was more than a hasty formula of

pitying resentment; it was a true and deep intercession for those who forsook him in his strait for the Gospel; an echo of the cry that he heard from Christ's martyr, and could never forget; an echo of the Lord's own prayer. And the language used concerning Alexander the Coppersmith, whom, as an enemy, not of himself, but of his Master, he had "delivered unto Satan," is not at all inconsistent with this spirit of intercession; "the Lord reward him." 1 Tim. i. 20. 2 Tim. iv. 14.

It is pleasant, however, to turn to the Apostle's more familiar and more tender supplications on behalf of his friends. How full of grace, for instance, is the prayer for Philemon which St. Paul tells us he constantly offered. Interceding with his master for Onesimus, he intercedes with God for the master himself; and the reference to this intercession, interesting for its own sake, as we shall see, is yet more interesting as affording a glimpse of that habitual pleading for friends of which St. Paul was almost the loftiest example. Onesiphorus also had been a benefactor in few things; rich is the recompense for which the grateful supplicant prays on his behalf: "The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day!" and meanwhile may his house be refreshed by it! Lastly, the Apostle's son and successor in the Gospel, Timothy, was always in his prayers; it being one great addition to his joy and one great element of his gratitude in his closing days thus to remember those who needed his help. Both the Epistles seem written as "before God and the Lord Jesus Christ:" they are full of the most tender solicitude, which finds its highest expression, as we shall see, in that memorable intercession: "Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things." 2 Tim. i. 18. 2 Tim. iv. 1. 2 Tim. ii. 7.

V. Lastly, there remains the series of Doxologies in these Epistles. Like the Benedictions at the outset, they are introduced by one unvarying formula: the watchword here is GLORY, as in the former it had been GRACE.

These expressions of adoration, however, do not occur

generally at the close. They are the most exalted strain of devotion, and will survive when all other offerings cease; but they are not reserved by St. Paul for the end of his Epistles. He sometimes begins with them, sometimes places them at the close of his petitions; but more frequently they are interposed at those points where his doctrine reaches the limit of human understanding, and his reverent spirit takes refuge in worship.

The Object of St. Paul's doxology is always God: "God through Jesus Christ." The same law rules here that rules in the offering of prayer: neither is formally addressed to the Holy Trinity as such, but both to the One God through the Mediator. It is not that the tribute of glory is denied to Christ: indirectly it is offered to Him in manifold forms. As Jesus is called upon and prayed unto by St. Paul, who nevertheless generally makes God as such the Object of prayer, so the saints are taught by him to glory in the Saviour, and to expect the revelation of His glory at the last, while yet he usually directs all doxology to the Father. Usually, we say: for the ascription of glory to Christ in the prayer of the Epistle to the Hebrews seems to be an exception; and there can be no doubt that St. Paul, like St. Peter in his second Epistle and St. John in the Apocalypse, was wont to offer his highest adoration to the Lord. In the order of economical worship, the GOD OF GLORY is the Three-One God in undistinguishable unity.

The solemn procession of these doxologies through the writings of St. Paul is familiar to all. Neglecting the chronological order, it is not impossible to find one that may be called the order of grace. First is the dread tribute paid to the unfathomable mystery of the Divine counsel: a doxology into which should merge all our reasonings and all our doubts, when the marvels of revelation make us afraid: "For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen!" Then comes the tribute paid to the God of

Rom. xi. 36.

redemption, occurring again and again, of which that in the Epistle to the Galatians may be taken as the type: "According to the will of God and our Father: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." Here, as in the Epistle to the Ephesians, and everywhere, the whole economy of the mediatorial work pays its tribute to the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ: but we must not forget that our Lord declares Himself to have been glorified in His own work; and that in the latest songs of the Scripture supreme adoration redounds from it to Him in the unity of the Father and of the Holy Ghost. The next great tribute is offered to God as the Source of establishing grace, based upon the revealed mystery of the Gospel, and made known by evangelical preaching: "To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen." With this must be connected that grand ascription to the God who supplies the people's need, the New-Testament Shaddai: "Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen;" which may be paralleled by the similar ascription at the end of the Ephesian Prayer. Towards the close of his writings, the Doxologies become, if possible, more triumphant; and, at the same time, connect the glory of God with personal salvation. St. Paul's Pastoral Epistles were written at the gate of heaven; and it is not surprising that his praises for his own individual mercy should much more abound. Three great ascriptions occur in the Epistles to Timothy; the first excited by the remembrance of the faithful Saying, and his own mercy as the foremost transgressor, though rather by the former than the latter: "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory, for ever and ever. Amen." The second seals the solemn charge to Timothy, when he is as it were consecrated finally to his Gospel mission: the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ is appealed to, who will be sent back for the reward of His servants by Him,

Gal. i. 4,

Rom. xvi. 27.

Phil. iv. 20.

1 Tim. i. 17.

1 Tim. vi. 15, 16. "who is the blessed and holy Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen." The last this saintly hand ever penned, before he joined the never-ceasing singers, paid its tribute to God's preserving and delivering

2 Tim. iv. 18. grace. "And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." Thus we see, that in St. Paul's writings, as in our own individual life, the offering of praise to God regards first His unspeakable perfection, then contemplates His redeeming work, then triumphs in the assurance and hope of personal salvation.

The analysis of these devotions of St. Paul has thus been sketched, hastily indeed, but with some pretension to completeness. In this outline we have given the plan of the following essays. Whilst attempting to expound these Greetings, Thanksgivings, and Petitions in their context, their order, and their unity, we shall keep the holy Apostle in view as an inspired example of the Christian pleader with God. So, by the Divine blessing, we may not only use the devotions he has left, but use them in his spirit, and pray St. Paul's prayers as he himself prayed them.

SALUTATIONS.

I. INVOCATIONS.

II. GREETINGS.

III. BENEDICTIONS.

I.

SALUTATIONS.

Under this term we include those Invocations, whether of greeting at the commencement, or of benediction at the close, which are found in all, or nearly all, St. Paul's Epistles. They are formulas, strictly speaking, though not absolutely bound by a mechanical rule. A certain type of expression is evidently present to the writer's mind which invariably guides his phraseology; the changes that occasionally appear are simply variations on the one theme, and variations, in most cases, easily to be accounted for. These are the only set, or stereotpyed, sentences that can be found in the Apostle's writings. This, of itself, would commend them to our earnest study; but, in addition to this source of interest, they have a striking theological stamp and significance, being, in a certain sense, watchwords of the truth, as well as invocations, furnishing a key to the interpretation of the documents which they sanctify by a form of devotion. We shall consider the introductory Greetings and valedictory Benedictions in their order, after having first taken a general view of the common element that unites them.

I. INVOCATIONS.

Looking at these formulas in their external, and, as it were, historical aspect, there are some preliminary observations of importance that suggest themselves in relation to our present object.

We must needs be struck by the fact that these phrases are of St. Paul's theological mintage, under the Holy Spirit owing their origin to him. Whether we regard the new terms pressed into this service, and the long prescriptive sanctity of those which they displaced; whether we take the words separately, or view them in their new combinations; whether we think of the pervading character of this kind of devotion, or mark with what regularity its phrases strike a note at the outset that echoes at the close, thus rounding every Epistle with a sacred formula; however we look at these Invocations, they claim to be placed among the peculiarities and characteristics of the Apostle. They are, like so many others, his own sayings; "things new" brought out of the rich treasury of which the Holy Ghost made him master for the Church's good. In no writings that preceded his do we find these phrases: witness the earliest Christian document, the first pastoral epistle, in Acts xv., and the Epistle of St. James, and the historical books that were beginning to be known. On the other hand, in no writings that followed his are they altogether omitted; their stamp, at least, is impressed upon them all down to the last. St. Peter, who, in other respects, preserves his individuality so sharply that we can distinguish from every other the one voice that speaks in the Acts and the Epistles, here falls into St. Paul's strain, and imitates him partly at least in both letters. St. Jude adopts it, as also does St. John in one of his three Epistles, and with a double imitation in the Apocalypse. But these instances of the wavering use of St. Paul's phrases, while they pay a tribute to the force and authority of his style, leave him still, so to speak, the proprietor of his own formulas. They are strictly specimens of what we are taught to call, in modern language, Pauline phraseology.

These invocations, as such, are based upon the epistolary phrases of courtesy and good-will current in the ancient world. They are the Apostle's substitutes for the "Greet-

ing" and the "Peace" which the Greeks and the Hebrews, in their respective languages, used for the expression of their well-wishing. These, in their naked and simple form, we may suppose St. Paul never used after he began to be "a man in Christ," when all things became new to him. Not that Christianity abolished them at once, or, indeed, abolished them at all; the sacred "Peace," made doubly sacred by the "My" that the Lord had added to it, could never become obsolete; and the Greek "greeting" is found still in the two earliest documents of Christianity. St. Paul did not reject or disparage either; the "Peace," in particular, he often used to convey his fervent good-will. But, as formulas of salutation and valediction, he made them new by a new meaning and order. The "greeting" he elevated for ever into "grace;" and the "peace" he made new by its connection with the grace that provided, and the mercy that bestowed it, through Jesus Christ. His earliest benediction was "grace and peace" at the beginning, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" at the close. With many variations the same strain always is heard. These became his token in every Epistle; not only in those which remain, but in those which probably are lost; not only in the more elevated writings, but also, as we see, in the simpler effusions, like that to Philemon.

Such general observations have a certain interest; but they are only external, and concern the latter. It is much more important to remember that these phrases of the Apostle are the chosen language of inspiration; that they are the watchwords of the theology with which St. Paul's name is specially connected; and that their constant recurrence in the sacred language of devotion,—beginning, continuing, and ending every treatise on the Christian faith with these its most impressive text-words,—was designed by the Holy Spirit to keep the eternal principles of "the Gospel of the grace of God" before the Church.

St. Paul was chosen to be the expositor of the precious
Col. ii. 2. peculiarities of the economy of grace: in unfolding "the mystery of the Father and of Christ" he had a vocation almost unshared. Whilst in his estimation of himself not worthy to be called an apostle, in his estimation of his high calling he claims the preeminence above all. As an example or pattern of the achievements of Divine grace, he places himself in the forefront of all men: "in me first." So also as the expounder of the doctrines of that grace he
Eph. iii. 8. takes the foremost rank: "to me is this grace given," also. What then can be more impressive and appropriate than the unceasing repetition of these memorial words? By them the Apostle keeps before our minds and hearts continually the central truths of his teaching. By them he being dead yet speaketh; by these formulas—and because they are formulas—he speaketh to almost every congregation of Christendom, and almost every time they meet. The Benedictions of which grace is the key-note are heard wheresoever this Gospel is preached, wheresoever worshippers assemble in the name of Jesus. Each of his salutation-words alone—grace, or mercy, or peace—proclaims his own Gospel; but their combination and order constitute a testimony or a protest which the Church will always need and shall never lack.

Further, it requires to be borne in mind, in our consideration of these habitual forms of prayer, that they are used within the Church, and presuppose the Christian people's familiarity with the creed and the system of Christian doctrine. It has been said that the words of the Benedictions are watchwords of St. Paul's theology; but it must be remembered that they did not of themselves teach that theology. They are its devotional expression, but do not contain any doctrinal definition or statement as such. The dogmatic teaching is thus introduced by prayer, or sanctified by benediction; but in both cases it is supposed to have been already received. These

formulas were publicly read in the hearing of instructed Christians. They are not appended to documents of a missionary character, expounding to unconverted heathen or Jews the newly-received doctrines of the faith. Such documents we possess, in the forms of addresses and appeals inlaid into the Acts. But in those documents we find no such language as our Benedictions contain; nor can we very well imagine St. Paul prefacing with "Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ," an appeal to the Greeks on Mars' Hill, to the semi-savage idolaters of Lystra, or the embittered Jews of Antioch. This remark admits of a double application.

First, we must assume at once that the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, and of the economical relations of the Persons of the Holy Trinity, underlies these apostolical forms of sound words. All the members of every Christian community were either already baptised into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, or were in course of preparation for that baptism. Bearing this in mind, or rather, what is more to the purpose, bringing an active recollection of this to the study of the words, harmony is introduced, and precision, where otherwise would be obscurity and indefiniteness. The expositor who denies the doctrine of the Triune God finds these phrases literally unmeaning; or, if he seeks to impose a meaning on them, he finds them intractable. So also, on the other hand, the orthodox Christian who takes them as the authoritative statement and exposition of a new and mysterious doctrine, will perceive that they tell him only half the truth. Just as in the early Church the instructed faithful knew well that the apostolical phrase which they heard—of baptising "in the name of the Lord Jesus"—had the Saviour's own triune formula behind and beneath it, and were unconscious of any perplexity, so, in the case of those who heard these Benedictions, a profound fundamental

Acts xix. 5.

truth had been already embraced that gave the solution to whatever ambiguity they might seem to involve. If grace and mercy and peace were invoked from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, this was clearly understood by those who were believers in the mediation of the Incarnate Son of God; and, without the word, they would supply by a Christian instinct and necessity the secondary mediation of the Holy Spirit.

Moreover, the fact that these Invocations are uttered for the benefit of the disciples of Christ gathered into the close fellowship of worship, must also be remembered in their exposition. They who receive the Christian benediction are the adopted children of God, who is their Father in a sense that none others may claim to know. However narrow it may seem, and however opposed to the current thinking of our time, the fact remains that the great documents of Christianity are addressed to the chosen and faithful. Their phraseology is for the elect; to be spiritually discerned and to be spiritually interpreted. The leading terms of the Benedictions are supposed to be already understood, experimentally understood, by those who receive them. Grace, mercy, peace, love, communion, are words which have already been made precious to the minds and hearts of those to whom they are spoken. To remember this, also, at the right time is of great advantage.

It is of equal importance to bear in mind that these apostolical Invocations are prayers, and thereby teach us in what sense, and in what sense only, human benedictions are pronounced upon the people of God. They are not official formulas, of which the New Testament contains no example; or, if the apostolical official dignity be claimed for them, they are still rather appeals to heaven for the descent of blessing than declarations that that blessing is given. The holy Apostle does not speak as if the people bent their heads before him to receive a benediction that it was his prerogative to bestow: he rather bids them lift

up their hearts with his in supplication to the common God and Father of all. In fact, there is no benediction of man, either in the Old or in the New Testament, that strictly corresponds with those which abound in the Benedictionals of some Christian churches. All the Benedictions proper are either offered to God, or come from Him by human invocation: His alone is the prerogative of blessing and being blest. In the most stately and formal example of which we have any record, the ordering of which is given with precision, the language is pitched to this strain: "The Lord bless thee and keep thee!" The most solemn Benediction, properly so called, in the New Testament, is that in which the whole congregation by the ministry of the elders bless by thanksgiving and prayer the eucharistic elements. The Benediction of St. Paul is indeed pronounced with uplifted hands, but over the heads of the people only, as uplifted to God for them. The force of this fact will be felt if we strive to transfer to the New Testament the notions of later times, and imagine these Invocations translated into the style of priestly or pontifical ritual. As an organ of inspiration, and the instrument or channel of such unlimited blessing to the Church, to St. Paul, if to any on earth, the prerogative of sacramentally blessing the people might seem appropriate. But he disclaims this, both negatively and positively. The only personal declaration as from himself that we ever hear him making takes no higher and no more authoritative form than this: "My love be with you all!" He blesses his people by invoking for them, and bidding them join him in invoking for themselves, the blessing of God.

Num. vi. 24.

1 Cor. xvi. 24.

It must be noted, further, that these formulas have been sanctified by the Holy Ghost to the Church's use. They have supplanted all others, and commended themselves as worthy of all acceptation. They were doubtless prepared for the function and place which they have occupied in the more public and private service of God;

and without any express injunction the mind of the Spirit was by all men understood. It has been observed that the later writers of Scripture have to a certain extent used these forms. They discerned in them the authoritative New-Covenant rendering of the Old-Covenant priestly benediction. After St. Peter and St. Jude had adopted them, these formulas must have come into very general use. The Book of the Revelation gives token of the habitude of a generation after St. Paul's death: St. John there expresses his own greeting in the Apostle's words, and closes with the well-known Benediction. Thus the volume of Scripture ends with the Pauline formula. The first uninspired document of Christian literature, the former Epistle of Clement, takes up the Apostle's greeting, and thus bears the same testimony to the custom of the first century. So also, though with sundry variations, do multitudes of writings that followed. St. Paul has given his Salutations to all times. Out of his phrases benedictory expressions have been formed for use both in the East and West: especially that well-known eucharistical invocation of "The peace of God which passeth all understanding!" There is no more perfect invocation in worship, public, social, or private, than "Grace, mercy, and peace!" But it is the form of sound words which we sometimes term the Apostolical Benediction that has received the highest honour in this kind. At the beginning or at the close of the service it has for ages conveyed the common blessing of the Triune God upon the evangelical Church. And wherever the spirit of due reverence reigns, the formula is retained in its integrity.

Num. vi. 24—26.

Phil. iv. 7.

1 Tim. i. 2.

Lastly, it is a preliminary remark of some importance that the Benedictions that begin and those that close the Epistles must be regarded as connected, or rather as mutually supplementary. To this may be added, further, that all the invocations of all the Epistles, not only those that occupy the first and last place, but also those which

occasionally occur as ejaculations, must be taken as one connected whole: the Divine and authentic Benedictionary, which needs no additions of human device. Not one of these expressions but helps the general exposition; and the benefit is further enlarged if the remainder of Scripture is included. For instance, what a rich flood of light is poured upon the entire series of the Invocations by that once-uttered salutation with which, as we have seen, St. Paul ends a life and a labour that was full of blessing to all: "The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit!" All graces that are supplicated are centred in a Person, and a Person who is God, in all the fulness of His Benediction, to the spirit of every Christian. Again, a word in St. Peter is very helpful. St. Paul's phrase, which he adopts, "Grace and peace," never has a verb either expressed or indicated. We of course can easily supply it; but St. Peter makes our conjecture needless. He gives as it were an authoritative commentary on the phrase he quotes, "Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied:" a word which, beyond all others in the language he wrote, was suitable for the filling up of what was lacking in the Apostle's formula. St. John also in the Revelation gives an important explanation of St. Paul's meaning, bringing out most fully the Trinitarian significance of the Benedictions. These instances might be continued. But it is unnecessary to say anything more to pave the way to the consideration of a series of phrases which, though limited in the variety of form, are absolutely unlimited as a treasury of Christian truth and blessing.

2 Tim. iv. 22.

1 Pet. i. 2.

Rev. i. 4, 5.

II. INTRODUCTORY GREETINGS.

St. Paul's introductory Salutations conform generally to one type. But they have an interesting history, as they develop into the full form with which the Pastoral Epistles make us familiar. That history we must glance at; partly for its own sake, and partly for the sake of the exposition.

It runs through three stages: first the "Grace and Peace" with which the Apostle began; then the same words, with
Rom. i. 7. the addition, "From God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ;" then the same phrase, with the insertion of "Mercy" between Grace and Peace.

2 Thess. i. 1, 2. It is probable that the Apostle, writing to the "Church of the Thessalonians, in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ," added only the plain and simple words "Grace unto you and Peace." That was the first evangelical innovation on the familiar "Greeting" of the Greek and "Peace" of the Hebrew. In two letters contained in the Acts—that of the Apostolic Council in Jerusalem, and that of Claudius Lysias—we have the Greek phrases. We find one of them also where it seems anomalous, in the Epistle of St. James, which forsakes the Hebrew altogether, and adopts the classical phrase. St. John, in one of his private Epistles, omits both the Greek and the Hebrew, and sub-
3 John 2. stitutes: "I wish that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." Deducting these exceptions, the remaining books of Scripture adopt St. Paul's Greeting or some slight variation of it. The Epistle to the Hebrews, it may be mentioned, is an exception around which there has always hung a certain veil of mystery. It is a letter, or at least it takes that form; for
Heb. iii. 1. it soon addresses the "holy brethren." It ends in the very manner of St. Paul; and yet its commencement is unlike his style: as if a treatise begun only under his auspices was taken as it proceeded into his own hands.

The Apostle used the form only once in its earliest simplicity. In the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, and always afterwards, down to the last, the invocation is addressed to the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The only noticeable variations are found in the Colossian Epistle, where the invocation is from God the Father alone, explained by the occurrence of the name of the Lord Jesus Christ immediately afterwards; and in the

Epistle to Titus, where "Saviour" is added to the "Lord Jesus Christ." Besides these, however, there are two very remarkable expansions of the formula, which give a characteristic to the two most deeply doctrinal Epistles of St. Paul. Writing to the fallen churches of Galatia, to which alone among the Christian congregations he has no congratulations to send, he lets his invocation from the Lord Jesus flow on into a glowing reference to the Saviour's redeeming work, and thence into a doxology to the Father. The secret of this change is obvious; it is to be sought in the impassioned vehemence of their jealous teacher and Apostle, who seizes the first occasion of the mention of the name of Jesus to set forth evidently before them His atoning sacrifice, from sole dependence on which they had been seduced. Thus viewed, the change has a wonderful pathos. To an opposite reason another and equally remarkable deviation in the Epistle to the Romans may be ascribed. Between his own name, known to them only by report, and that of the saints to whom he writes, he inserts one of the most condensed and comprehensive parentheses even in his writings, embracing some of the prominent characteristics of the Gospel, of its Divine Author, and his own call to the ministration of that Gospel. This most weighty and most powerful of all his weighty and powerful letters breaks through the Apostle's ordinary rule, both in the exordium and in the conclusion. But the irregularity does not affect the salutation in either case. Titus i. 4.

The Epistles to Timothy and Titus, written at the close of his life, introduce a new term into the Greeting: between grace and peace "mercy" is inserted. This word gives a rhythmical perfection and theological completeness to the formula which it had not before. The term itself is not a favourite one with the Apostle, at least in its relation to the economy of grace. He uses it very sparingly elsewhere; but it seems to have been taken into his later vocabulary with a peculiar fulness of meaning,

and is employed in the most affecting relations in the last three Epistles. To this final and consummate form we shall now turn. We are bound to regard it as the edition of his greeting which St. Paul desired to transmit, or rather which the Holy Spirit commends, to our study and devotion.

GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE.

As an invocation these words may be, must be, regarded as addressed to God, and as addressed to man. They first carry our thoughts to the Source of every blessing, and then regard all blessing as conferred on His people.

There can be no doubt that we have here the Benediction of the Triune God, invoked solemnly upon the young minister, whom "in the faith" St. Paul rejoiced over as his son, and to whom in a very especial manner he committed his Gospel. Many reasons have been assigned for the introduction of the term Mercy. Was it to show his deep personal interest in his convert? Was it because ministers of the Gospel especially need mercy? Was it because the course of years had deepened the Apostle's feeling of the profound tenderness of the grace of God towards the misery of man? Probably for none of these reasons; but rather because the tendency of Christian worship was more and more strongly towards the distinct acknowledgment of the Three-One God: in other words, for the same reason that the Trinity is impressed more vividly upon every scene in the Apocalypse than elsewhere. In fact, the Apostle's phrase, as adopted in these pastoral Epistles, and as we think it would have been expressed had he written other letters, had become more distinctly than before the New-Testament re-utterance of the old Levitical Benediction: "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." And it was on its way to that

1 Tim. i. 2.

Num. vi. 24—26.

more full expansion or development which was reserved for St. John, who like St. Peter comments on the formula that he adopts: "Grace be unto you, and peace, from Him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the Seven Spirits which are before His throne; and from Jesus Christ." Rev. i. 4,5.

But while the Triune God is invoked, as the context shows, the three terms, Grace, Mercy, and Peace, are not to be referred respectively to the three Persons of the adorable Trinity. Grace is of God, mercy is of God, and peace is of God. There is no distinction indicated; hence in the sublime Greeting of the Apocalypse, which throws back upon all the former Greetings its evidence that they also were addressed to the Trinity, mercy is omitted, and only the earlier two retained. The Supreme Being is clothed with each of these perfections individually, even as He is clothed with them all in combination. He is "the God of all grace," He is "the God of peace," and He is in the Old Testament "the God of mercy." In the final Benediction grace is assigned always to our Lord; but the article, THE grace, shows that it has a peculiar meaning there, and is the grace of the Mediatorial Lord. We do not usually find mercy or peace ascribed distinctively to any one Person of the Trinity. Never throughout the Scriptures is any such separation carried into the internal recesses of the Three-One. As the Son doeth whatsoever He seeth the Father do, so He also as the Son feels towards man all that the Father feels. In function and office and economical relations the distinction is kept up with most exquisite precision; but the whole round of Divine emotions belongs almost indifferently to the three Persons. Grace, love, kindness, mercy, peace or reconciliation, are all sentiments that have their inexhaustible fountain in God as such. Hence, apart from the fuller revelation of the mediatorial work, the Trinity of both Testaments is the same, as the fountain of blessing and grace and peace. Rev. i. 4. 1 Pet. v. 10. Rom. xvi. 20. Ps. cxviii. 1. Num. vi. 22—29.

No Sabellianism is to be dreaded here. There is one God throughout the Bible, even as there are three Persons in one God. And the introductory Greetings keep that present to our thoughts by making the threefold blessing proceed from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus, with what might almost seem a careful avoidance of distinction. The ultimate fountain of man's hope is "in God," in the one God whose last revealed name—a name by which He "was not known" to the fathers—is the Three-One.

1 Pet. i. 21.

Ex. vi. 3.

Still, the terms, whilst they refer in their combination to the one original Source, are distinct in their meaning and application as traced up to the Divine Being. Grace is in God the lovingkindness which rests freely upon man, as an object deserving nothing; the favour which goes out towards him as guilty and deserving displeasure. It is therefore the essential love of God seeking the creature as only in a state of sin and rebellion. That same grace, as looking upon the misery of man bearing the consequences of his sin, and as applying the means of his recovery, is mercy. And that same mercy and grace are peace in God, when the atonement provided by grace, and offered by mercy to justice, is regarded as having produced in the Divine Being Himself the propitiatory effect: reconciliation to the world or peace for man. The fountain is open in Zion for sin and uncleanness only because the fountain is open in God above: an infinite fountain of grace or favour towards the sinful race, of mercy for the sorrows and miseries of all transgressors, and of the peace of pardon for every penitent suppliant for salvation.

But the God from whom this triune blessing is invoked is "God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Here there is very much to ponder. It was evidently the form of words chosen by St. Paul to express at once three truths. First, the saving blessings of grace flow from God through

Eph. vi. 23.

the Christian atonement only upon the family of those who are His adopted children by faith in Jesus Christ. Other blessings, the common benefit of the reconciliation of God in Christ with the race, the free gift to mankind, are bestowed unasked upon all. But the blessings invoked upon the household of faith come from Him who is the reconciled Father, not of the race as such, but of those who are adopted into His family on the terms of the New Covenant. Secondly, the triune benefit, here called grace and mercy and peace, comes through the mediation of the Redeemer. The title "our Lord," which in this connection St. Paul never omits, regards Him as seated on a mediatorial throne which He has reached through the offering of His atonement upon the cross. By the sacrifice of Himself He obtained great riches for us: the eternal love of God became through his propitiatory work grace and mercy and peace for man; and this is His abiding dignity, as the incarnate Head of the Church, that He is joined with the Father in the bestowment of all that man receives. Lastly, the word of mediation is omitted, because the Lord Jesus Christ, through whom as the Minister of the Trinity these heavenly gifts descend, is Himself God, to be honoured as the Father is honoured. Of this no more sufficing demonstration is needed, or can be had, than the fact that in the invocation of the blessings of grace—the bestowment of which must ever be the supreme prerogative of God—His name is conjoined with that of the Father: "and from our Lord Jesus Christ." Not one solitary omission of this conjunction shakes the stedfast strength of the argument.

Viewing these blessings as invoked upon man, we perceive more clearly the propriety of the terms both in their distinct and in their combined character.

Just as they spring from one source in God, the eternal fountain of His redeeming love, so also they enter the hearts of those who receive them as one blessing. They

constitute the abiding, continuous triune Benediction of the Triune God, as necessary to the spiritual life as the air we breathe is to the life natural. Hence each of the three terms is sometimes used in the New Testament to signify the whole fulness of the gift of heaven. That Benediction enters to abide for ever in the heart that values it: there to increase and abound yet more and more until it deepens into the blessing that flows from the beatific vision. The triune inheritance of blessing cannot be thoroughly understood until we grasp the idea that before it disparts and becomes threefold for our need, it is one as the Blessing of God—that word of Scripture which has and needs no definition.

But this central blessing is threefold in its impartation to us. It is Grace, whether of God the Source or of Christ the Mediator, for the guilty sinner; it is Mercy for the wretchedness that follows and accompanies guilt; it is Peace as the spiritual rest that results from the enjoyment of both. Grace proclaims within the soul that a Saviour has borne away its sentence of doom; mercy is that very Saviour Himself entering with His own message, and healing the miseries of the respited and pardoned sinner; peace is the same Saviour's gift when He sends that other Comforter to bear witness of what He has done and is still ever doing. Grace is Jesus approaching the Cross; mercy is Jesus the good Samaritan; peace is Jesus coming down by the Holy Ghost. Grace is pardon, mercy is recovery, peace is sanctification. Grace puts up the Divine sword into its sheath; mercy heals the wounds it made; peace keeps it away for ever. When the Christian joins in the invocation of this triune benefit, the first word reminds him of his sin, the second of his spiritual maladies, the third of his soul's enemies and conflicts. And the threefold Benediction meets all his need: it is the triple brass that fortifies him, and under the panoply of which he goes on his way rejoicing and without a fear. And yet

there are not three blessings, but one blessing. Every act of supplication and faith implicitly recognises God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; as the Giver of grace, the Fountain of mercy, and the Author of peace. So every blessing that comes from God comes equally from the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as the grace that forgives still the past, and comforts the soul in its present need, and adds something to its hope of final victory and its present possession of life. Grace is always pardoning sin, and "reigns" as such; mercy is for ever "rejoicing against judgment," healing its sharp wounds; peace is for ever invoked to "keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." The three blessings are one: one in their source; one in man's constant need of them and in God's constant bestowment; one in their final issue.

Rom. v. 21. James ii. 13. Phil. iv. 7.

III. VALEDICTORY BENEDICTIONS.

THE valedictory formulas to which we now pass are generally termed Benedictions; but they have only a conventional propriety in the name, being precisely of the same order of invocation as the Greetings. They also have their history and process of external development in St. Paul's Epistles, the study of which will help very much towards the understanding of their theological import. Like the Greetings, they present one typical and perfect form, and that will stand in the exposition for all the rest.

The word Grace rules the entire series of these final Benedictions, but there are a few remembrancers of the older forms, to which we must briefly refer. The first of these is the immemorial word of the ancient covenant—that of Peace—which throughout the books of the Old Testament is the symbol of the perfect favour of God in heaven and the richest and most comprehensive blessing of God on earth. On this word our Saviour impressed the seal of a new and still higher sanctity: He blessed it

and hallowed it for ever in word, He unfolded its deepest meaning on the Cross, and it is His gift from heaven to His saints. St. Paul has paid his full tribute to the word Peace. We have seen how he took it up into his apostolical greeting: we have only to glance through the closing paragraphs of his Epistles to see how perpetually present it is to his mind as a single phrase, perfect and entire in itself, and lacking nothing for the conveyance of a full Valediction. The "God of peace" and the "peace of God" are forms that answer to each other, not only in the one passage where they occur together, but throughout his writings. The word is woven in a great variety of ways into the tissue of manifold benedictions. To the Galatians, for instance, it is linked with "mercy;" while to the Ephesians it introduces "love with faith." We shall see hereafter how it is the Divine attributes to which prayer delights to turn; the tranquil peace of God is invoked to confute Satan, the world, and the turbulent unsanctity of man's own heart.

Phil. iv. 7—9.

Gal. vi. 16.

Eph. vi. 23.

Besides these variations on the word Peace, running through St. Paul's writings, there are a few other benedictions which need not occupy us more than a moment. "The Lord be with you all!" occurs once in the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians. And, in the First Corinthian Epistle, the termination of which is distinguished by three distinct final formulas, we have the only instance of a direct personal expression of regard, very much after the fashion of a modern message of love. It will be interesting to turn to the passage, as in itself a singular instance of St. Paul's peculiarities. Every one must have noticed how slowly and with what seeming difficulty he closes some of his letters. This is one of them. The emphasis of the combination of the several sentences will be noticed hereafter: now it is enough to point to the tender personal kindness that adds even to the closing benediction the words, "My love be with you all!"

2 Thess. iii. 16.

1 Cor. xvi. 24.

Returning then to the habitual valediction of which Grace is the sign, there are observable three leading forms, with sundry subordinate variations. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you" is the first and most general; this diminishes to "Grace be with you" or "with thee;" and finally we have the form which is appropriate to the Church as such, that is, the full liturgical phrase: "The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen." 2 Cor. xiii. 14.

The first form is found in the greater number of the Epistles, with a few variations, such as the occasional insertion of the word "all." Invoking His benediction on the Galatians,—the foolish and bewitched Galatians,—he is careful to show by his last word how true his heart is in its desire for their welfare: he asks that the Saviour's grace may be "with their spirit," to which as against the fleshly mind he thus makes his appeal, and calls them, by a singular exception, as if compensating for the terms in which he had questioned their Christian adoption, Brethren. The same peculiarity of expression, however, "with your spirit," is found in Philemon. It is not so easy to account for the variation at the end of the Ephesians, where the Saviour's grace is invoked upon those who love Him "in sincerity" or uncorruptness. Connecting this with the close of the First to the Corinthians, where St. Paul gives to "anathema" every man who loves not the Lord Jesus, we are taught to appreciate a certain peculiar tenderness with which the Apostle's heart beat towards the Person, and, so to speak, the character of his Master. Gal. vi. 18. Phil. 25. Eph. vi. 24. 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

In the Second Epistle to the Corinthians we have the full and finished valediction. Why it was given in this Epistle there is nothing whatever to show. Suffice that it summed up, in a manner of which there had been hitherto no example, the relations of the three Persons of the Holy

Trinity to the work of redemption and the accomplishment of the Divine will in the saints. Nothing resembling it is found elsewhere; as an echo of the baptismal formula it is unique. It is evidently, also, so constructed as to be adapted exclusively to public worship: hence it was early appropriated to the service for which it is used in the present day, and for which, doubtless, it will be used so long as congregations assemble on earth.

Long after this full expansion of the Benediction, the Apostle began to abbreviate this formula, making it both concise and individual in its application. The Epistle to the Hebrews says simply, "Grace be with you all," and the same is found in the three Pastoral Epistles. The First, however, to Timothy, contains the only instance in which the benediction is invoked upon an individual: "Grace be with thee!" What is most remarkable here is, that the omission of the name Jesus Christ is obviously the result of a certain process of condensation, which leaves the omitted words to be implied. The terms which connect grace with the name of Jesus are dropped; but, strangely enough, the article remains, as if to bear witness of the sacred Name that is left out. It might seem as if the same process were at work which caused the baptism in the name of Jesus to stand for baptism into the triune Name. "The grace be with you!" is literally the formula: that grace, namely, which had now become the symbol of all that is saving in the Gospel of Christ, and all that produces holiness and happiness in man. The article is never found in the Greetings, when all manifestations of Divine goodness are traced up to their fountain in the Divine nature. In the grammar of the Holy Ghost, that article is never wanting in these benedictions, even when it might seem superfluous. The reason, doubtless, is that in them the grace of God is always connected, whether avowedly or silently, with the redeeming work of Christ.

Heb. xiii. 25.

1 Tim. vi. 21.

It is a fact which will not escape the attentive reader,

that the very last invocation traced by the hand of St. Paul—as it were, the dying benediction of the writer as such—has a new and striking feature in it. "The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit!" precedes "Grace be with you!" What a volume of meaning is there in this double invocation, as it were the legacy of the holy Apostle to each and to all, to Timothy, to me, and to every one! The presence of Christ with the spirit of every believer always and in all places: than this there is nothing within the possibility of thought more precious to the Christian. "He that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit:" the largest word the Book gives us for our privilege of union with Christ. It is hard to keep within limits when such a word as this, the last of such a teacher, is suggested. Let us not forget in due time to recall it.

2 Tim. iv. 22.

1 Cor. vi. 17.

While such is the final legacy of St. Paul, the impression left upon the mind by this preliminary survey of his Benedictions generally is that the leading word in his theology is Grace. Whatever changes the Invocations, whether of greeting or of valediction, undergo, this word is never lost. It holds its preeminent place, and leaves its echo in the ear whenever and wherever his writings are read. The last word is grace, as the first was grace. It is his token in every Epistle. It is his elect word. Other terms of leading theological interest have their full tribute paid to them; none of them are omitted, all are honoured, in his catholic and universal doctrine. Let the glorious central words in the vocabulary of the Christian religion be traced through the New-Testament writers, and it will be found that there is not one, not even love, that holds elsewhere a higher place than in his writings. Yet it remains true that Grace was his chosen motto, and memorial, and badge: the word which he wrote with his own hands when his deputies wrote the rest. The word has clung to his name through all succeeding times. Grace, as St. Paul understood it, the grace of Jesus

Christ, has become in the systems of theology that have ruled Christian thought the most fundamental of all words: most central in doctrine, most effectual as a protest against error, and most representative of the energy of the Gospel.

THE APOSTOLICAL BENEDICTION.

2 Cor. xiii. 14. "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen." It is the will of the Divine Spirit that this form of words should serve many purposes. These we may indicate very briefly; reserving some topics of deep interest for future treatment, when the prayers of the Apostle will require us to refer to them. The Apostolical Benediction, as it once and only once assumes this perfect form, stands in one of St. Paul's Epistles, the authenticity of which has never been called in question; and the most captious criticism has never impeached its phraseology as we now study it.

The first and most obvious point of interest connected with this solitary formula is its distinct relation to the Holy Trinity and the formula of Christian baptism. The manner in which the mystery of the three-one God is gradually revealed in the New Testament is itself a mystery, but one into which it is not necessary here to enter. Omitting the visions of the Apocalypse, we have three great central passages which serve as it were for the explanation and illustration of the universal phraseology of the New Testament. At the beginning of the Gospels Jesus is baptised of the Holy Ghost as the eternal Son of God incarnate: that text sheds its glorious light over all the Gospels and their revelations of the Divine nature of Christ and the dignity of the Personal Comforter. Before He departs the Redeemer ordains that Baptism—not His own now, but His people's—be administered "in the

Matt. xxviii. 19.

name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost:" that text throws its radiance on the whole history of the foundation and spread of the Church. And here, in this Benediction, St. Paul gives a third clear and distinct and perfect declaration concerning the three-one Source of the spiritual good of the Redeemed. He that does not understand these words aright, will understand aright no part of the apostolical teaching: for this text also pours its steady light upon all the doctrinal part of the New Testament. Whatever doubt may arise on the consideration of the passage in itself should be dispelled by a collation of it with the others, and with the general tenour of the New Testament. None can bless save One, even as no name is the foundation of faith and hope but One. The demonstration of the Holy Trinity contained in the two great formulas, that of baptism and that of benediction, is of a kind which becomes more and more absolutely satisfying the more profoundly it is studied in all its bearings. How many doubting souls—souls doubting all things because doubting one—has this benediction helped: blessing them, so to speak, doubly in turning them away from their sceptical and rationalising hesitation.

It is, however, the expression of a mediatorial Benediction, an invocation of the blessings of the economy of grace upon the congregation in the order of the Divine bestowment in Christ.

It is "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ:" the loving-kindness or love of God, as it looks upon man in sin and guilt, looks upon him only from the face of Jesus Christ; only through His finished atonement; only through His mediation and intercession generally. Hence it is His grace: He has connected it with His own name for ever; to us, whether on earth or in heaven, grace will be eternally the grace of Christ. That word is St. Paul's token in every Epistle: it is also his Master's token both in heaven and in earth. The force of this truth will be still

2 Cor. xiii. 14.

more deeply felt if we remember that in every instance save this the Apostle's closing Benediction, that in which he takes leave of some of the churches for ever,—his final benediction, in which his deepest, and at the same time most familiar, thought would be uttered,—invokes only "the grace" of the Redeemer. Our Lord is the God of grace, as well as the Mediator of the covenant of grace; and this name stands in the forefront of the formula, because the bestowment of the favour which rests upon sinful man through Christ's mediation is the essential preface to every other blessing. There can be no love of God shed abroad in the heart save as resulting from the infinite self-sacrifice of Him whose grace stooped for our
2 Cor. viii. 9. sake to a measureless impoverishment; nor can the Holy Spirit be imparted save through the hands of Him who has obtained by death all gifts for man.

2 Cor. xiii. 14. "The love of God" is not here said to be the love of the Father. His love it is; but He is not named as the Father for reasons that may be gathered from the general strain of the mediatorial language of the Christian covenant. That which is deadly heresy when referred to the interior relations of the Three-One God is pure and simple truth when referred to the dispensation of mercy through the atonement and the ministration of the Trinity in the Church. The Father is the Fount of redemption; or rather the Head of Christ is God: it is not said that the Head of the Son is the Father. As the first name in the economy of redemption, the Father here represents the Godhead absolutely, thus rendering needless what later
1 Cor. xi. 3. ascriptions have found needful—the insertion of "three persons in one God" in the formula. The love of God is here twofold: first, the love of the triune God is revealed through the grace of Christ, which was and is its eternal expression: that love was and is behind the grace; as, on the one hand, the love could not flow to us save through the grace of atonement, so, on the other, the grace of the

atonement could not flow to us save through the love of God. Secondly, the love of God is the manifestation of the Divine love in the heart as the source and spring of all that is good and holy and Divine in our renewed nature: it is "shed abroad" within us, not as the effusion of comfort and joy, but, as the word itself indicates, as light and strength and cleansing grace poured abundantly into the soul to abide in it for ever. Rom. v. 5.

"The communion of the Holy Ghost" is generally the common participation in the person and offices and gifts of the Divine Spirit, through whose influences alone the inward work of religion is begun, continued, and brought to consummation. Here it must be emphatically noted that the communion necessarily implies three ideas, which are one and strictly inseparable. The fellowship invoked is the general and individual possession of the Holy Spirit, the sacred, common heritage of the people of God. The benediction does not expressly ask for the Son and the Father; but the grace of the Son and the love of the Father cannot be separated from the internal possession of the Giver of each. In the case of the Holy Spirit, however, the participation in Himself is made emphatic; because through His entrance into the soul all blessing comes, and the way is thrown open for the Father and the Son. The word also includes, not as a separate meaning, but as the same under another form, the idea of the Spirit's own impartation: upon the whole company and every individual in it the benediction invokes the distributive influence of the Spirit as every one has need. And, lastly, the word irresistibly leads on to the further thought of the unity created by this common gift. This is the blessed "fellowship" which is spoken of immediately after the day of Pentecost; this is the true community of goods, or "all things common," the transitory type of which the Church for a season saw. For this our Saviour prayed: "that they may be one;" one in the "communion of the Holy Ghost." 2 Cor. xiii. 14. John xiv. 23. Acts iv. 32. John xvii. 22.

But, whilst thus retaining the propriety of the distinction between the Three Persons in the formula, it must be remembered still that "the Lord our God is one Lord;" the blessing of the Church descends through what seems to be a triple channel from one Source.

Hence, lastly, the benediction is to some extent the supplement of the greeting. In this its final form it shows that the Church, the congregation of God's people and saints, is the abiding home and sphere of heavenly blessing. The greetings and benedictions generally are invoked upon all without reference to the Church as such. But this one, which gathers into itself and consummates, and at the same time enlarges, all the other invocations, is so ordered that it must be pronounced upon the people gathered into one. Each member has his portion of the common good; but only as one of a holy community. The blessing, as it falls upon the heart of the believer, tells him first of his interest in Christ and His grace, the Source of all his hope; then it assures him of the love of God, the secret of happiness and of heaven; and it leaves lingering in his ear the word "communion." So, in the ancient Liturgy of the temple, the Blessing is proclaimed on the holy mountain, to proceed thence to every member of the religious fellowship of God's people: "The Lord, that made heaven and earth, bless thee out of Zion!"

Ps. cxxxiv. 3.

Let us not pass from these invocations without paying one more tribute to the word that rules this province of our subject, which begins and ends every Epistle, and is the theme that runs through all. The gracious expression is new in the New-Testament service, but without losing any of its ancient meaning. In its earliest classical use it signifies that undefinable grace which made rejoicing, which created joy, of whatever kind. The heavenly charm of this word makes every page of the New Testament smile. The most impressive illustration is seen in the

Saviour's human graciousness: "Grace is poured into thy lips;" "they wondered at the gracious words." So grace is poured on the word which testifies of Him. But the term which once signified gracefulness generally has received a new triple application in the Gospel. First, it is the grace of God in Christ, the Source of all salvation to sinful man; then it is the same grace entering the heart and working all its wonders there; then it goes back again to God in thanks. These three meanings run through the New Testament, and give the term CHARIS, in its theological sense, a peculiar grace in the classical sense. Ps. xlv. 2. Luke iv. 22.

There are two and only two other terms with which Grace shares this specific threefold employment. Love also is the source in God of all salvation in man; it is also in man the bond of perfectness, the principle by which faith works all good; and it also goes back to God in devotion as the heart's pure and perfect response. Thus neither of these two great new creations in the vocabulary of Christianity can be expounded without pursuing it through these phases. Grace and love come from God, abiding in man, and go back whence they come; each completes its cycle in the experience of true religion. But there is another word which has the same triple application, though this is neither so obvious nor so generally acknowledged. It is Glory. It will be seen hereafter that the love of God which is manifested in His grace is also termed His glory: not the glory of His absolute perfections so much as the glory of His perfections in the work of redemption. The Epistle to the Ephesians will impress upon us "the riches of the glory of His inheritance." This word also runs through the same sacred cycle. The glory which shines forth from God "in the face of Jesus Christ" abides in man as his sanctification unto perfection: we are "changed into the same image, from glory to glory," and the glory of God is our internal irradiation of holiness, our transfiguration in Eph. 1. 18. 2 Cor. iv. 6. 2 Cor. iii. 18.

His sight. And that glory goes back to God in the highest expression of gratitude and joy and thanksgiving. The doxology of the Church, and of every individual soul, is expressed by glory as well as by thanks. Our devotion
Eph. i. 6. is "to the praise of the glory of His grace:" where the two words are for once combined. But this leads onward to the sequel.

John i. 16. The word Grace, however, must close this section; and form the transition to the Thanksgivings which follow: in this sense also "grace for grace."

THANKSGIVINGS.

EUCHARISTICAL.

It has been already shown that the thanksgivings in St. Paul's Epistles are abundant and diversified, shedding an equal and most refreshing glow over all themes and all styles of writing alike. It has been seen, also, that the material in this province of our exposition may be conveniently classified. There is the formal doxology which at set times arrests the flow of the discourse, and sends it up to God in pure adoration: the examples of this must be collected apart; for they belong to a higher order, and leave simple thanksgiving far behind them. Then there are the expressions of gratitude which are only introductory to supplication: these must be taken as part of the Prayers into which they merge. There remain two classes of passages: first, the special thanksgivings, on behalf of the churches or the individuals addressed by the Apostle, which all but invariably begin and sometimes end his Epistles; and, secondly, those terse and vigorous ejaculations of gratitude which are familiar as proverbs and dear to all Christian hearts. To these two departments in their order our attention will now be directed: with the understanding, however, that, as the passages referred to are scarcely ever definitely marked off in the text, but glide by an insensible transition into the current of the discourse, nothing like formal exposition must be attempted. With the Prayers, properly so called, the case will be found to be different.

I. FORMAL THANKSGIVINGS.

It needs but a slight glance to note that the expressions of gratitude which begin the Epistles are introduced by
2 Cor. i. 3. two formulas: the one, "Blessed be God," occurring only
1 Cor. i. 4. twice; the other, "I thank God," being the customary phrase. Now, although there is a marked difference between the strains of thanksgiving thus respectively commenced, it will serve no useful purpose to do more than mention the distinction. We shall therefore comment on the lessons taught by the themes of the Apostle's gratitude as they arise in the order of his letters.

THE THESSALONIAN EPISTLES: THANKSGIVING FOR THE SUCCESS OF THE GOSPEL.

To the Thessalonians St. Paul addressed the firstfruits of his pen as an inspired writer. The thoughtful reader would perhaps detect in their style the fact that these were his earliest writings; at any rate, remembering that they were the earliest, he will not fail to perceive several things in their tone and character that are best explained by that fact. For instance, he will mark the fervent expression of gratitude for the triumph of the Word of God in his hands. Something like this, indeed, is found in most of the letters; but in none that follow do we hear anything like the joyous, jubilant, even rapturous tribute to the success of a preached Gospel which we hear in these earliest letters. The first time the preacher becomes the teacher, and places on record the Gospel that he had orally delivered, he attests most amply the extent and the reason of its great success. His gratitude was not indeed
2 Tim. ii. 8. inspired by the fact that it was "my Gospel," or that it wrought its wonders in his hands; but his thankfulness abounded because it demonstrated its Divine power through the Holy Ghost. This is the one topic of the

Thessalonian thanksgiving. But we must trace it through two or three variations of form.

Its first expression is a grateful acknowledgment of the Christian change that had been produced in these first-fruits of the Gospel through the energy of the Word.

The earliest of St. Paul's descriptions of a prosperous religious life is deeply interesting as such. It is also worthy of study as containing the first exhibition of the three elements that best of all define the Christian probationary character. Never before had "faith, hope, and charity" been written down as the ministering graces of man's perfection. In due time the Apostle will compare them in their abstract relations, and give the preeminence in this life and in the next to love. Here he has no thought of comparison, but magnifies the triumphs of the three in their respective functions in the life of probation. He remembers what he had seen of the swift effects of the Divine Word in their souls; and the wonderful union of rapidity and reality in the work of grace in them awakened on every remembrance his warm gratitude. The faith with which they had received the word that he brought to their hearing was a working faith: whilst it was the instrument of the attainment of a salvation that was not of works, yet in its energy these Thessalonian Christians had vanquished fierce opposition, and surmounted great difficulty, and obtained precious promises. Thus the first mention of Christian faith in St. Paul's writings strikes the note to which he is ever afterwards faithful,—that "faith which worketh by love." And the love itself which had been "shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost" had approved itself true by its self-sacrificing toil: it was laborious charity. And the hope which he had himself witnessed in them for a short season, and the energy of which he had since heard of from Timothy, was a patient hope: patient, not merely as enduring from day to day the adversity of life, but as deliberately in Christ Jesus

1 Cor. xiii. 13.

Acts xvii.

Gal. v. 6.

Rom. v. 5.

remitting to a futurity beyond this state its best and loftiest expectations. This triune blessedness of their religion will be best understood when we connect with it the words that close the chapter; in which the Apostle describes the people of Achaia as everywhere familiar with the special characteristics of the Thessalonians' conversion: how in the work of faith they renounced idolatry, and in some unprecedented way gave signal proof of their renunciation of it; how in the labour of their love they served their newly-revealed God, the "living and the true;" how in their patient hope they waited for Jesus to perfect their deliverance from wrath. There was probably in the early religion of these converts something unknown to us that gave a deep emphasis to the Apostle's gratitude on their behalf; but the perfect summary describes the prosperity of vital godliness in every soul.

1 Thess. i. 9, 10.

It will be observed, however, that the real spring of St. Paul's thankfulness is the efficiency of the Gospel of Christ, the Word preached by himself, in producing, and in producing so soon, so excellent and approved a character. As the Apostle himself speaks, he rejoices in the power of the truth; as the Holy Ghost speaks through him, He rejoices in the fair work of His own hands. Here, then, on this the special text for ministerial confidence in the Word, let us pause to consider these important terms. Two things are observable. The preacher sees in the confirmed piety of the Thessalonians matter of double gratitude: first, for their election and the effectual working of God in them; and, secondly, for their faith and co-operation with the Divine Spirit. He thanks God for both, here as always united. The thanksgiving to God does not exclude his congratulating them on their personal energy and faith; whilst his congratulation does not in the slightest degree derogate from the tribute of glory to God.

First, the Divine accomplishment of a Divine purpose

by His word is matter of the Apostle's praise. He beholds in the conversion and stedfastness of the Thessalonians the token that they were included in the number of those who were elected, through their acceptance of the Gospel call, to the enjoyment of the blessings of the Christian covenant. "Knowing, brethren beloved of God, your election" means most obviously, and can only mean, that the Apostle inferred their election from their exhibition of the fruits of the Spirit. The election was effected through the Divine "power," working by the "Holy Ghost" the strong "assurance" or conviction of faith. God receives the glory, in the Apostle's thanksgiving, of the power that wrought persuasion in the hearts of these hearers of His Word: that persuasion resulted not from any art or vehemence in the preacher's utterance, but solely from the Word, from its own power as the Word of God, and the power of the Holy Ghost using it as an instrument. Here, in the first occurrence of that great word "election," around which, especially in St. Paul's use of it, such dire controversies have raged, we have the clue to his application of the term throughout his writings. He never himself contemplates, nor permits us to contemplate, an election of God that is not effected in, that is not inferred from, our acceptance of the Gospel. Carried up to an eternity past or future, the word has no meaning for human theory or practice.

1 Thess. i. 4.

In the Second Epistle we have a fresh light shed upon the same truth, and an additional help for its interpretation. Throughout this St. Paul seems to write more expressly as the Apostle of the Gentiles, and to bring more vividly to his own mind the scenes recorded in the Acts. The bigotry of the Jews and the calling of the Gentiles were never brought into such direct conjunction as in the conversion of the Thessalonians. In their case was most signally demonstrated the equalising of the two great portions of mankind, whether as seen in the rejection of

Acts xvii.

the perverse Jew or in the election of the believing Gentile. This runs in the writer's mind throughout the letter. It gives its emphasis to the expression twice used here, but here alone used, "We are bound to give thanks." It is as if the Apostle was under a strong constraint to violate his own and his people's prejudices, and give thanks for the revelation of the election of the heathen. Hence in the thanksgiving we now consider, the word "hath chosen"—used only here by St. Paul in this connection—is precisely the same which expresses in the Greek of Deuteronomy the choice of the ancient peculiar people: a circumstance that is more than a mere coincidence. This does not imply, however, that his words concerning the order of salvation has only this meaning. The calling of the Gentiles rises into the higher thought of an eternal purpose that all the saints, whether Jews or Gentiles, should, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth, attain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. "By our Gospel:" when St. Paul uses this phrase, he always has an undertone of meaning that adds to the idea of the Gospel of grace generally the specific idea of a Gospel of free and undistinguishing grace. Chosen in "sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:" the choosing is vitally, essentially, inseparably bound up for us with the work of Divine grace and human co-operation. Speculation may carry the election backwards to the Eternal Mind in which all things are already known from the beginning; or forwards to the eternity from which all things are regarded as having already reached their end. But in either direction we are lost if we shape our meditation in formula: such contemplations have no speech nor language for their expression. In the actual life of probation we have to join the Apostle in thanksgiving that we can infer our election from our grace.

2 Thess. ii. 13.

Deut. xxvi. 18.

2 Thess. ii. 14.

2 Thess. ii. 13.

Secondly, this leads to the strain of gratitude that rejoices over the Thessalonians' own faith and obedience.

He does not ask them to thank God with him for their high privilege as called to receive a sovereign bestowment of the grace of God denied to others. The language is not, "Let us thank the Divine grace that through its operation we are not as other men are:" however true that might be, it is not the tone of the common rejoicings of St. Paul and his converts. On the contrary, the whole of the second chapter of the former Epistle is occupied, first, with a challenge to his readers to give their testimony to the Apostle's own fidelity as put in charge with the Gospel; and secondly, with a generous acknowledgment of their courageous faith in the Gospel they heard. "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the Word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." The mighty operation of God is in those who believe; but those only who believe experience that mighty operation. Here there is a clear distinction between the "effectual working" and the "faith." The two terms are not interchangeable. Whilst there is no true faith that is not of the operation of God, there is much operation of God which hindrance on the part of man prevents from becoming effectual. Belief is Divine and human. Were it not Divine, the Apostle would not have so fervently thanked God. Were it not human also, marking, in the mystery of freedom, the difference between man and man,—"all men have not faith,"—he would not so earnestly have thanked them for bearing so patiently, in their laborious charity and working faith, the enmity of the Jews on whom "the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost;" nor would he have so plainly said that they "were ensamples to all that believe," and that by reason of the exceeding growth of their faith he "gloried in them in the churches."

1 Thess. ii. 13.

2 Thess. iii. 2.

1 Thess. ii. 16.

1 Thess. i. 7.

2 Thess. i. 3, 4.

The same double truth we find in the stern context of

2 Thess. ii. 13. the Thanksgiving in the Second Epistle. St. Paul does not expressly include their faith among the reasons for gratitude in this passage: nor indeed does he ever thank God for the gift of faith as such. But he places the Thessalonians' faith in contrast with the unbelief of the Jews; and, while he does not say that their faith reached its perfect operation in the concurrence of their will with the will of God, he does inversely say the same thing by declaring that those whose punishment was "to believe a lie" and to be "damned" believed not because they "had pleasure in unrighteousness:" they received not the love of the truth, "that they might be saved." Again he asks their prayers that the same success which his Gospel could boast among them might attend it elsewhere in spite of the "unreasonable and wicked" Jews: unbelievers because unreasonable, not because reprobate only. From all this we gather that the thanksgivings of St. Paul in these Epistles do not forget the responsibility of man, while they acknowledge the supremacy of God. There is no merit in believing the Gospel; but there is no absolute necessity laid upon any to believe it. Without Divine grace there can be no faith; but in spite of Divine grace there may be no faith. And thanksgiving for the spread of the Gospel must not fail to blend congratulations over those who believe with gratitude to the Giver of that grace by which they believe.

2 Thess. ii. 11, 12.

2 Thess. ii. 10.

But we must not thus leave these most jubilant sentences, our last impression of them suggesting controversy. Rather let us learn the lesson they teach of unfaltering joy over such triumphs as the Gospel wins, whether in our own hands or in the hands of others. Joy: for the process of salvation, the working out of the Divine purpose in the spirits of men, whether many or few, is matter of boundless satisfaction to all who are like-minded with St. Paul. Again and again does the thought of their growing holiness provoke him to gladness deep, full, and irrepres-

sible: "What thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes in the sight of our God!" Who can help thinking of Him who first spoke of joy in God's presence over a sinner's salvation, and regarding St. Paul here and elsewhere as the perfect illustration of his meaning and the rival of the angels? Such gladness, so deep and always unspringing, should fill our hearts as we see God's word having free course and His work reviving. And unfaltering joy: the Thessalonians were few; their salvation had for its foil the uttermost wrath upon multitudes, and those the Apostle's own brethren after the flesh; the Gospel was encountered by "absurd and wicked men" everywhere; and the Divine good pleasure was satisfied only in a few amidst the mass who believed the lie;—yet the holy Apostle counts it all joy. Even this measured and scanty blessing touched the deepest springs of his gladness. He allows no thought of sorrow to intrude into the mystical sphere where the joy of his Lord reigned. Well for us also if we, living after many generations in the midst of the same opposites of salvation and wrath, can, like St. Paul, feel bound to thank God always.

1 Thess. iii. 9.

2 Thess. iii. 2.

THE EPISTLES TO THE CORINTHIANS: THE GIFTS AND CONSOLATIONS OF GRACE.

Passing over the Epistle to the Galatians, where there is nothing eucharistical, we come to the Corinthian Epistles, which abound in the ejaculations of gratitude—hereafter to be considered—and are both commenced by an act of thanksgiving appropriate to their respective contents. The dispensation of Divine gifts is the theme that unites the two: in the former Epistle it is the dispensation of the spiritual endowments, in the latter of the consolations, of grace.

In the earlier Epistle the formal expression "I thank my God" first occurs. Here also the Church is more dis-

1 Cor. i. 4.

tinctly than before regarded as in Christ, a profound phrase that afterwards becomes, as we shall see, more common than any other. Here also the Apostle uses for the first time the appropriating language, "my God," which we shall meet with again, but not often. Passing by these points, we note the subject of the thanksgiving, the grace that took the form of special graces or gifts. Two things here must be remarked in reference to this: the Corinthians were blessed in being abundantly endowed with the extraordinary endowments of the Spirit; the Apostle's thanksgiving on this behalf makes all these subordinate to their sanctified and permanent fellowship with Christ.

It was undoubtedly the purpose of the Epistle to condemn the perversions and abuses of Divine gifts of which the Corinthians had been guilty. But it was no part of St. Paul's plan to disparage those gifts. Hence at the outset he magnifies their value as tokens of the Divine favour, and as most blessed in themselves. When they
1 Cor. i. 4. first received "grace in Christ Jesus," the Spirit dispensed to them severally as He willed the gifts of insight into the Scripture, of utterance with tongues, of special occasional illuminations from the other world: gifts that were bestowed upon the Corinthian community more abundantly than upon any other. They were in a pre-eminent sense a church of St. Paul's own founding and care; and the Holy Spirit had honoured the Apostle by vouchsafing to them their wealth of gifts. This the Apostle gratefully and, if the word may be allowed,
1 Cor. ix. 2. gracefully acknowledges. They were "the seal of mine apostleship;" and, notwithstanding all the faults with which it was his duty to reproach them, he blessed God for the abundance of their unrevoked spiritual endowments. Abuse does not nullify the privilege; spiritual
1 Cor. xii. 31. gifts were to be earnestly coveted; and, whether in churches or in individuals, the Spirit still dispenses

talents according to the election of grace and by prerogative. The peculiar gifts of the Corinthian Church have been withdrawn from the Church universal, notwithstanding the eagerness of many to prove that they have been continued. But special endowments are still bestowed on communities and on men; and this Corinthian thanksgiving teaches us that the gifts spring from grace, and should be acknowledged to the glory of God.

But, secondly, these manifold gifts are made in the Apostle's acknowledgment subordinate to the continuance and consummation of fellowship with Christ. As they sprang from grace at the first, so they are lost in grace at the end. The thanksgiving passes as it were into a prophetic invocation, in which the endowments are forgotten, and the end of all is the being found "blameless" in the day of the Lord Jesus. This spotlessness of spirit is to be secured and retained through the faithfulness of God, who hath called His people, not to the possession and use of spiritual gifts, but in them and through them and above them also, to the "communion of Jesus Christ" Himself. Preeminent gifts from age to age distinguish the few: but all are called to the equal participation of the common Lord. After this most careful and skilful thanksgiving, the Apostle proceeds, with the "but" that in verse ten changes his voice, to the condemnation of their abuses. In this we need not follow him.

The Thanksgiving in the Second Epistle is remarkable in many respects: taking it altogether, it is one of the most striking passages in St. Paul's writings. Its one subject is the consolation of God in Christ; but, before dwelling on that, a glance must be given to the external peculiarities of the paragraph. And first we mark a new phrase, "Blessed be God," which, whenever it occurs, 2 Cor. i. 3.
indicates a very strong emotion, and is here specially appropriate as introducing the Apostle's sense of deliver-

ance from one of the sorest conflicts of his life. It is observable also that the Father and Author of all mercy and consolation is such only as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; both fatherhoods being here for the first time found in the Epistles, and, as thus united, nowhere else. It will be further remarked that the term "consolation" or comfort enters into the sentence with a variety of form and application that has no parallel in the case of any other word in any other passage. There is a most interesting play upon various forms of the term itself, and this interest is increased by the relation in which it is placed to other terms: in fact, the long sentence is compact of consolation. The English translation improves the melody by varying the term twice; but the overpowering emotion of the writer would perhaps have been better reproduced by letting the one word be seen to recur ten times in five verses. Lastly, it bespeaks the delicacy and grace of the Apostle's mind that this exuberant expression of thanksgiving exhausts itself before he once alludes to the painful combination of trials out of which he had been delivered, or was in course of deliverance. And now let us briefly analyse the thanksgiving itself.

It is addressed to the God of all consolations, for the comfort which He bestows as the Father of mercies; but the consolation for which St. Paul offers his gratitude is regarded as Christ's consolation, shared with Him by the mystical fellowship that makes the believer one with Him in suffering and in triumph; and, lastly, his own consolation is valued by the Apostle mainly as reaching Christ's people through him.

The wonderful power of these words is best felt when we refer them to affliction generally, of which the Apostle's tribulation was only a special instance. We are forbidden to dwell upon the particulars of his grief, which are only hinted, and that very indefinitely. Suffice that he had

passed through a period of complicated and exhausting anxiety: driven from Ephesus by tumult; exposed to deadly danger, so deadly that he was cut off from all human hope, and pronounced the sentence of death upon himself; kept waiting in indescribable suspense as to the issue of his former letter; the sending of which had been his severest trial; and dreading above all things some ruinous calamity to the Church of Corinth, in which he felt an interest unlike in many respects, if not surpassing, that which he felt in any other:—in all this he had been comforted by the mercies of God, and from all this he had been delivered by the Divine consolation through Titus. But the expression, "God of all comfort," that is, of each specific kind of consolation, gives the thanksgiving to us in its widest generality. God's names are manifold as our sin and misery: He is the "God of all grace" for our sin, He is the "Father of mercies" for our misery of every kind, and He is the "God of all comfort" for every variety of our woe. His heart eternally the same, His countenance in Christ changes to meet our necessity as we come to Him. And this name demands that we pause and ponder; as it now rises on the page of Scripture, it is at once old and new; old, for God's stedfast consolation has been turned upon the children of men from the beginning; new, for never before had this name of the Paraclete and of the Incarnate Son been given to the Father.

2 Cor. i. 3.

1 Pet. v. 10.

2 Cor. i. 3.

This part of the thanksgiving is obviously an echo of the Thessalonian prayer: "comfort your hearts." But the second element of it, that the consolation comes through Christ as the counterpart of the suffering which is shared with Him, introduces a new view of religion, or rather a new aspect of an old view, and one which will continually reappear, viz., that our sorrows and consolations are alike shared by Christ, and are precious fruits of our union with Him. The words, as originally written by St. Paul, exhibit a touching antithetic play in them, intimating that both

2 Thess. ii. 16, 17.

the passion and the peace of Christ overflow upon His members. Doubtless, there was a special sense in which
Col. i. 24. the Apostle Paul filled up "in his flesh the afflictions of Christ;" but no such sense as denies to every Christian the obligation and the prerogative of continuing his Master's
Gal. ii. 20. sorrow and endurance in his own person as "crucified with Christ." So also we may suppose that this elect servant of Jesus had in his soul some richer overflowings of the Redeemer's heavenly joy than others rejoice in; but, granting St. Paul's prerogative, it is the common
Matt. xxv. 21. privilege to "enter into the joy of our Lord" to some extent even in this life, and to receive through our union with Him the virtue of an effectual consolation for every sorrow that we endure in His fellowship. Certain it is that here we have the first hint of that most elevated and elevating doctrine which teaches us, on the one hand, that
Rom. vi. 9. Christ, who Himself "dieth no more," nevertheless is so one with us that in our death to sin through the virtue of His Atonement He is still continually dying, and in our sufferings on His behalf continually suffering; whilst, on the other hand, His own immeasurable comfort in heaven overflows into the hearts and lives of all His own in virtue of that mystical fellowship. St. Paul, elsewhere, in the spirit of the Lord Himself, makes a division between the two; assigning the suffering with Christ to this life, and the glorification with Him to the next. And there is a grand truth in this, but there is some qualification needful. The suffering is excluded from the future state, but the consolation is not excluded from the present. The death and life will not be intermingled hereafter; but now they are intermingled. Christ is a savour of life to our holiness,—if we may quote St. Paul's words in a neighbouring chapter,—even while He is a savour of death to our sins. And we are all called upon, throughout the chequered life that now is, to thank the God of all comfort—the Father
2 Cor. i. 5. of our Lord and the Father of our mercies—that "as the

sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ."

It must be observed, however, once more, that St. Paul's thanksgiving is animated by the happy feeling that his Corinthians are one with him in his consolation. At first it might seem that he was grateful because the Divine comfort would enable him to comfort others generally: that is, those who are "in any trouble." But afterwards we perceive that he refers to these Corinthians in particular; and, assured of their union with him in Christ, rejoices because they would share his happiness when they heard of it, even as they would share his sorrow. In other words, he rejoices because he is confident that the same consolation in Christ that came to him would come to them. He deems them to be as intimately united to Christ as he himself was; nor can he suppose that any joy that came to him, in relation to the Gospel among them, would be denied to the Corinthians. It is the same generous identification of himself with them, and of both with Christ, which we constantly find: as, for instance, where it is hard to determine whether St. Paul means that he had the Philippians in his heart, or that they had him in their heart, or whether he meant both. On the present occasion the words flow on in the same high and intense style. Nothing can be more impressive than verse eleven, when rightly understood: the Apostle demands the prayers of many observers among them on his behalf, or rather he takes those many prayers for granted; and then rejoices to think that as the prayers of many had obtained for him a great benevolence from God, so the thanksgivings of the same many would proceed from joyful souls to God on his behalf. The depth of these sentiments is equalled by their refinement.

Phil. i. 7.

2 Cor. i. 11.

But we have to do with the plainer and more obvious lesson. Consolation is imparted to us that we may comfort others, first, by pointing to the example of God's grace in

ourselves; and, secondly, by using in their behalf the skill which our charity learns from experience. God is the
2 Cor. i. 3. Source of "every comfort" to us, that we may be the instruments of every comfort to those who are "in any trouble." No office of our faith brings us nearer the person of our Lord; in none do we more directly imitate Him; and in none does He take so much pleasure in seeing Himself reflected. He shines upon us that we may shine upon
Matt. v. 4. others. "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted:" we may without irreverence subjoin another benediction: Blessed are the comforted, for they shall minister comfort. Blessed indeed are those who learn this lesson of the Apostle; and who can thank God with a double gratitude: first, because He relieves them of their own dejection and sorrow; and, secondly, because He thereby enables them to succour their afflicted brethren. That those who have received the great consolation should feel the unspeakable dignity of their mission to be consolers of others, is one of the main lessons of St. Paul's self-sacrificing life; we shall often mark it as we read his prayers; but nowhere is it more nobly uttered than in
2 Cor. i. 4. this thanksgiving for comfort:—"Blessed be God who comforteth us, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.

A tribute has been already paid to the stately introduction of the Epistle to the Romans, rich earnest of the great exposition that follows. We now take up the thanksgiving
Rom. i. 8. which next claims precedence: "first, I thank my God through Jesus Christ;" noticing certain peculiarities in the form of this offering of gratitude, before we consider its matter.

St. Paul here gives us a glimpse into the innermost mysteries of his devotion. He makes his appeal to the

God whom he served alike in the secret shrine of his spirit and in the Gospel labour of his public life: calling upon Him to witness how constantly and how fervently his thanksgivings and his prayers mingled on behalf of the Roman Christians. Every word demands its comment. The Apostle speaks of himself as presenting a liturgical service; he uses priestly phraseology that recurs at the end of the Epistle, and occasionally elsewhere. Not numbered among the priests after the law, he was a priest after the order of the true Melchizedek: ministering at a hidden altar which he never left, and in the order of a course that was never interrupted. The service he offered was offered not only with his spirit,—that indeed was true, but not all the truth,—it was in his spirit that he waited on his never-ending ministry; in the sanctuary of his inner man, which Christ had entered and cleansed for the inhabitation of the Triune God. In that shrine he had formerly presented the worship of ignorance and ceremonial bigotry: honouring the Father, but neglecting the Son of His love, and blending with his adoration the breathings of threatening and slaughter against His saints. But it had pleased God to "reveal His Son in him," at whose command, "Take these things hence," the whole ritual of his carnal observances had retired from his heart for ever. There he revised his theology, and ordered the entire framework of his service anew. Conscious of the reconciliation, he could use language never used before, and say "My God" in the confidence of appropriating reverence and love. But while in the hidden temple of his spirit he rejoiced before the new-found God of his new life, in the deep satisfaction of an eternal possession, his service was never separated even in thought from the claims of the Gospel. The interests of Christ's kingdom were bound up indissolubly with all the thoughts and desires of his heart: to him there was no difference, save in words, between "In my spirit" and "In the Gospel of

Gal. i. 16.

John ii. 16.

Rom. i. 9.

His Son." But of this deep secret there could be but One Witness, and to Him now, as on every occasion, and in every place, he can make his appeal. The matter of his thanksgiving is twofold: first, he blesses God that the Romans had already received the Faith; and secondly, that it was about to be his own lot to see them, and rejoice with them, and confirm their Christianity.

Rom. i. 8. Their faith was "spoken of throughout the world." How and when they had received it he does not say, nor is there any other voice to break the silence. In a certain sense it had come to them, as it had come to him-

Gal. i. 1. self, "not of man, nor by man:" not by formal mission, apostolic or otherwise, but by the preaching of the Holy Ghost through the Christian Dispersion of the Pentecost. Some of the first and best grains of the "handful of corn on the top of the mountains" had been scattered on the seven hills of Rome. In the harvest great was the Apostle's joy. It was the only time that he had as yet sent his congratulations to a people not called by his own ministry; but God was his witness that for no triumph of the Gospel had he been more thankful than for this.

"Throughout the whole world:" deep gratitude utters large words. But this is not the language of mere hyperbole. Over the Thessalonians St. Paul had rejoiced that their faith was sounded abroad throughout Achaia: but the tidings and the influence of the conversion of the Romans radiated to the ends of the earth. It was as yet hidden from the Apostle that Rome's misbelief and superstition would one day be spoken of throughout the world. He could look upon the imperial city, with the eye of a strategist, only as the centre of the earth, having subtile affinities with every people in every region, filled with a life that pulsated to the extremities of human society. He knew well how much was gained when Rome was gained. And he spoke the language of strong anticipation—not fulfilled indeed according to his thought—of the impetus

to Christianity, westward and eastward, to the north and to the south, that would result from the establishment of a pure and earnest faith in the metropolis of the world.

The thanksgiving turned to prayer, without ceasing to be thanksgiving, when the Apostle referred to the great hope of his life, that he might visit them and confirm their faith.

The secret influence of this "his earnest expectation and his hope" runs through almost all the pages of St. Paul's recorded history. When the thought that he must "see Rome also" first dawned on his mind, we scarcely know; but we do not travel far with him through the Acts without perceiving that it became a master passion, too strong and too abiding to have been implanted by any other than the Holy Spirit. He began his course as an Apostle to the Jews; then he became the preeminent Apostle of the Gentiles; but in Rome the two missions would unite, and he was to consolidate there a Christianity composed of Jews and Gentiles, one in Christ Jesus. By this deep desire he not only yielded to an impulse of the Holy Ghost, but also magnified his office: as Peter and John went down to Samaria to confirm that new province of Christ's kingdom, so must a greater than either in the work of the Gospel go to Italy to confirm the allegiance of a far more important province of that kingdom. Hence he stedfastly set his face to go up to Rome; and, the time being as he thought nigh at hand, he sends this Epistle as his forerunner, to be the text of his future preaching, and to assure them of his joy in the prospect of so soon following his letter.

Acts. xix. 21.

In due time the Apostle's desire was granted him. But in this as in almost every stage of his career, he was led in a way most mysterious and unforeseen. Through much tribulation, and as the result of an appeal to Cæsar from Cæsar's representatives, he was led to Rome in bonds, and kept in bondage. How far he was able to accomplish his

cherished object,—whether he perfected the organisation of the Roman Church, went on to Spain, and then returned to die,—we know not. Nor is it needful here to inquire. We pass on to the Epistles which he wrote during his imprisonment, and by which he furthered the Gospel in his bonds.

THE EPISTLES OF THE IMPRISONMENT.

The four letters written in his own house in Rome bear abundant traces of the circumstances in the midst of which they were composed. The writer was able in perfect tranquillity of spirit to review the past, and surrender his soul to "the powers of the world to come;" whilst the present, between life and death, was given up to devotion. His soul was not fettered with his body; the spirit of supplication within him was not bound; and he who prayed always was now shut up to "prayers more abundant:" hence in these Epistles we shall find our richest material. But the thanksgivings proper, to which our attention is now directed, will not detain us long; partly because they run in a strain already described, and partly because they are generally interwoven with the prayers that will be considered hereafter.

To the Colossians St. Paul pours out his congratulations on their having received and made their own the truth of
Col. i. 6. the Gospel preached "in all the world." He returns to the old formula which unites the graces of faith and hope and charity. The ground of his rejoicing over them was their possession of the faith that is in Jesus, the love they manifested to all saints, and the strong hope of heaven which sustained them in the exercises of their faith and charity. After this beautiful variation on the three-one grace of Christianity in its perfection on earth, he passes on to his intercession for them: with the touching assurance that on the very day of his hearing about their con-

version they had been added to the number of churches never forgotten in his long Litany.

To Philemon, and the little society of the church wont to meet in his house, the Apostle sends his greetings. But his letter has a specific object. He mediates with the dignity of love between two of his own converts, an offending slave and an offended master. And no plea which he afterwards uses with such exquisite courtesy could have been more successful, or could have had more weight with Philemon, than the assurance that the Apostle remembered him daily in his prayers, with special thanksgiving for his love and faith. As the gratitude glides into prayer to God for him, and then into requests to himself for Onesimus,—from his father in Christ who calls him "brother," the single instance of the kind,—we may be sure that no gift would be felt by Philemon too costly a token of gratitude for such a place in the Apostle's daily devotions. Phil. 16.

The Epistle to the Ephesians, as it contains two Prayers, so it is introduced by a double thanksgiving: the former reverently acknowledging the blessings treasured in Christ for the saints; the latter thanking God for the Ephesians' participation in those blessings, in language very similar to that which we have just heard. The Ephesians also hear that they had been taken up into the Apostle's ceaseless devotions, from the day that he knew of their faith. The former stands alone in St. Paul's writings as a Benediction offered to the God and the Father of our Lord Jesus, in response for the Benediction sealed in Christ from eternity for His chosen people, and imparted to them in time as they become His people by being found in Him. Here is once more the great and deep distinction between the saved within and the world without. "In Christ" the Apostle beholds a new mankind marked out in the Father's counsel for all spiritual blessings from heaven: "accepted in the Beloved," and to be made Eph. i. 3.

"holy and without blame" through the Spirit. Summing up the privileges that distinguish the new race in Christ
Eph. i. 3. from the old race in Adam by one word,—"Who hath blessed us,"—he renders back the Church's benediction in language which beyond all other is kept sacred in Scripture for the Supreme being,—"Blessed be God!" The prayers into which the Epistle after this continually rises will bring us back to this subject in due time.

The Epistle to the Philippians has a deeper interest than any other in its opening thanksgiving. Between these companions of St. Paul's early tribulation and himself there was a peculiar bond of sympathy and love; and to them he opens his heart, his deep human heart, more perfectly than perhaps to any other people. It might seem a thing impossible to add intensity to the phrases of thankful remembrance that have passed before us; but we must needs mark here some finer touches unknown elsewhere. Concerning the Philippians alone does he say that
Phil. i. 3. "every remembrance" made him thankful. It gave him joy, only joy, to send his memory back to that "first day," when the Christianity of Europe was founded by his
Acts xvi. 13. ministry at the river side "where prayer was wont to be made;" when, amidst special interpositions of Providence, they received in much affliction the Gospel of great joy; and when they began a fellowship in that Gospel, its privileges and its service, that had never been interrupted "from that day until now." The circumstances of that critical time—the first day at once of the European Churches and of the Gospel's freer advancement upon earth—were such as to make it the theme of St. Paul's habitual gratitude. But how much was that heightened by the fact that "the whole remembrance" of their subsequent history was such as to give him satisfaction. The declensions and internal rivalries which elsewhere grieved him had not dimmed the brightness of the Philippian Church. Perhaps this was the only community for whose

consistent, equable, ever-advancing piety "from the first day until now" he could thank his God. Hence the inexpressible tenderness that pervades his letter to them, and the thousand tokens, to be felt rather than observed, of a love and secret understanding between him and them of which there is no parallel. How his thanksgiving once more takes refuge in prayer, and in what most confident prayer, we shall hereafter see. Phil. i. 5.

THE PASTORAL EPISTLES.

In the first series of his letters the Apostle is teaching and contending for the faith; in the second series, written at Rome, he is inditing the thoughts of a tranquil contemplation; in these last, to Timothy and Titus, he is taking farewell of the world, and leaving his legacy to his successors in the ministry. We have seen how the tone of gratitude fluctuates with the circumstances and occasion of every letter. And we must observe it still in the passages that remain. They are found in the two Epistles to Timothy: in one St. Paul offers a final thanksgiving for himself before he departs, and in the other it is for Timothy that he praises God.

In the opening chapter of these pastoral charges the holy Apostle, Paul the aged, ready to be offered up, seems to leave on record a great act of final penitence and faith. Let the reader mark the structure of the preceding paragraph, and see with what set purpose he introduces himself, his whole self, from the beginning, that he may rejoice over his own soul as the spoil of Divine grace. It is not an incidental reference, but one of the most elaborate and prolonged summaries of his career: introduced evidently for the purpose of paying his last tribute to the grace of the Gospel as shown in his own person. In all his writings there is no more remarkable passage than this: none more profound, none more sublime, none

finished with more care, none that has gone deeper into the heart of the universal Church. Its better part, however, belongs to the doxology that closes, and we shall meet it again. Meanwhile it is interesting to observe the order of the sentence. First comes the thanksgiving for the grace that strengthened him by the virtue of a new life to serve his Master Jesus in the Gospel. Then, secondly, the riches of the Divine mercy so lavished upon him as to make him a pattern,—the chief of sinners saved by grace,—lead his thoughts up to an act of worship in which the sense of personal gratitude is lost in the contemplation of the Divine glory. Never did he deal more rigorously with his former self: the Saul of this his last indictment was a "blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious;" it was only through mercy that he was not Saul still; and his final and eternal acceptance would be that of the "chief" of sinners. But it must not be forgotten that the leading note of his thanksgiving is not so much his own forgiveness and peace as the stupendous mercy that made him a minister of that Gospel which once he persecuted. Nor does it abate his thankfulness when he remembers that he had sinned in the deep ignorance of unbelief: the sincerity of his sin only brought him within the range of possible mercy; but it was "exceeding abundant grace" that at once forgave him his great debt, and accepted the payment of his life's earnest devotion.

1 Tim. i. 13.

In the Second Epistle, and in the last recorded thanksgiving, he shows his deep concern for his "son in the faith;" in a style which is a reminiscence of earlier writings, but with a strong peculiarity of its own. The sentence is just what the first strong feeling of the Apostle made it. His purpose is to tell this young minister how warm a place he had in the writer's heart and prayers; that he was night and day remembered in intercession, with which thankfulness for Timothy's hereditary faith and early piety was mingled. The thought of Timothy's ancestry reminded

1 Tim. i. 2.

him of his own; and he adds, concerning himself, the testimony that he "served God with a pure conscience from his forefathers." Not long since we remarked on the liturgical ministry of Paul "in his spirit;" and showed how the entrance of the Gospel into his soul had renewed and changed his interior service. Our present words, St. Paul's last testimony concerning his own devotion, are not inconsistent with those. The lessons derived from his forefathers were not forgotten when he sat at the feet of Jesus. The same God whom he had served before, he served still; but with a higher, purer, and better service, —the service of a pure, sprinkled, and pacified conscience. Whereas, writing to the Romans, St. Paul spoke of his spirit as the sphere of a new service in the Gospel of Christ, here, writing to Timothy, and paying a final tribute of loyalty to the older dispensation, he declares that his present service was only that which his forefathers had prepared him for, though they knew it not. Thus, as in the former Epistle, St. Paul's testimony seemed to count his former life a blank, and worse than a blank, in the present Epistle he qualifies that testimony, and thanks the God whom he had from his forefathers known, but whom now, in the Gospel of His Son, he served in a regenerate spirit and with a pure conscience. With these words we take farewell of the Apostle's more formal thanksgivings.

2 Tim. i. 3.

Rom. i. 9.

II. EJACULATIONS.

A series of informal, abrupt, ejaculatory acts of gratitude, now to be collected, will close this review. Before examining them in detail we must observe that they are expressed by a peculiar formula—"Thanks be to God"— which was familiarly in the Apostle's use at a certain time, exhausts itself in one or two Epistles, and never recurs. This is not the only instance of a phrase created by a

1 Cor. xv. 57.

special current of emotion, and employed as a favourite for a season. It is enough to point to the "Faithful Saying," which is limited to one little batch of Epistles; though other illustrations will occur to the students of St. Paul's phraseology. The swift and vivid expression of thanks which we now consider may be said to be the property of the Epistles to the Corinthians, though it lingers on, slightly varied, into the Romans. Those Epistles were written, as we have seen, amidst circumstances of special trial; and their writer was under the pressure of more than ordinary emotion. To that emotion —to a temper of mind just then liable to strong outbursts of sacred excitement—the phrase owed its origin. This will appear more clearly as we proceed.

1 Tim. i. 15.

THE VICTORY.

It is at the close of the resurrection chapter that this word first springs into the Apostle's thought. The hymn of Christian hope has all but spent its melody: there remains but one condensed epitome, the conclusion of the whole matter of the Church's rejoicing anticipation. In one sentence St. Paul brings together the three terms most terrible to man, never elsewhere united as they are here,—death, sin, and the law. Death has no terror that sin does not give it; and, if sin be destroyed, death is resolved into a stingless accident in man's history, a mere change from what is good to something far better. Sin has an eternal terror of its own, dependent neither on death nor on the law: yet it is the law which defines and gives strength to sin; and, unless the law be satisfied, sin must rule for ever. But in the work of the atoning Saviour these words lose their triple terror: the law is satisfied, and sin is abolished, and death is translated into endless life. Then, cries the Apostle, in the name of the ransomed Church, and finding a new song for this new transport: "Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our

Lord Jesus Christ!" And this word is the earnest, always on the lips of the redeemed upon earth, of that greater thanksgiving when redemption shall be complete. 1 Cor. xv. 57.

CHRIST'S TRIUMPHAL PROCESSION.

Following the chronological order we pass to another victory, achieved also over sin, but through the peaceful warfare of the Gospel. The reader must turn to the second chapter of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, and mark the transition from the thirteenth verse to the fourteenth. In the one, the Apostle has "no rest in his spirit:" in the other, he is at the head of "a triumphal procession in Christ." The two renderings of this glowing passage are harmonised and made one "in Christ:" if in Him the Apostles are led through the world the captives of grace, it is that in Him they may share the victory as other captives swell the procession "in every place." Borrowing his image from the poor triumphs of human warfare, which celebrate the victories of man's lust and ambition, he describes by one vivid expression the steady advance of the King, as the Psalmist had long ago extolled it, in the way of the victory of "meekness and righteousness," humbling first the rebels against His law, and then raising them into sharers of His exaltation, leading them captive still, and yet "causing them to triumph." But we have to do with the outburst of thanksgiving. In it the Apostle finds refuge from all his anxieties and fears: the sure victory of Christ, and of His servants in Him, was the never-failing compensation for their sacrifice and toil. Nor is the exultation of his gratitude marred by the sad counterpart which this triumph involves. Changing the figure, the triumphal procession is a diffusion of the knowledge of Christ: an incense of life breathed forth upon all who receive it, and an odour of death to all who receive it not. So it must be, now and for ever, in the history of

2 Cor. ii. 13, 14.

Ps. xlv. 4.

"the Gospel of the glory of the blessed God." It is permitted to His saints to forget the dead in the joy of the
2 Cor. ii. 14. victory of life; and still to cry, "Thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ."

THE ZEAL OF TITUS.

St. Paul had sad experience that all his fellow-servants in Christ were not like-minded with himself; and that amidst the multitudes of those who, whilst bearing the
Phil. ii. 21. Christian name, "seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's," there were but few who were equal to every strain upon their fidelity. We remember the warm, frank commendation he bestows upon Timothy in the Philippian Epistle: "Ye know the proof of him," as one who "naturally cares for your state," thinking nothing of himself in the comparison. The eighth chapter of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians adds Titus with Timothy to the selecter number of the self-sacrificing servants of the Gospel. The words of the sixteenth verse deserve careful study: the more narrowly they are observed the more pure appears the zeal of Titus. He was like-minded with his father in the Gospel; had the "same earnest care;" and what higher praise could be given him than this? Whilst he complied with the exhortation to go to Corinth, it was his own heart that went first; "of his own accord" he accepted the mission, and his love was "more earnest" even than his obedience. But neither Paul nor Titus had this sacred passion, save as the gift of God: it was the effect of grace; and, knowing the inexpressible preciousness of a spirit of self-devotion, the noblest principle that man's heart can beat with, the Apostle ejaculates rather
2 Cor. viii. 16. than writes:—"But thanks be to God, which put the same earnest care into the heart of Titus for you!" Thanks be to God! for Titus' sake, who received the grace; for the Corinthians' sake, who had the benefit.

THE UNSPEAKABLE GIFT.

One of the briefest and most abrupt of these impassioned expressions of the Apostle's gratitude, this can have no other object than that supreme Gift of God to man which includes all other gifts: which gives back all former gifts that he had lost, and superadds what St. Paul can find no other word to describe but indescribable. To suppose that he is thanking God for the spirit of benevolence given to the Corinthians, or that he is putting into the mouths of the poor in Jerusalem the gratitude which they should utter, is to forget altogether the manner of the writer. It is the very law of his communications to trace every stream of grace to its fountain in redemption; and to make the Divine benevolence in the gift of grace the spring of all charity upon earth. Hence, after having exhausted in these chapters the whole subject of Christian almsgiving—its ground, its fruit, its methods, its arguments, its blessedness—he, as his wont is, suspends the current of his thought, that he may pour out the great thanksgiving which alone could worthily close it. Ready with his familiar formula, and choosing a new word,—to be afterwards used again only when he is dwelling upon the unsearchable mysteries of a grace "past finding out," —he cries: "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable Gift!"

2 Cor. ix. 15.

2 Cor. ix. 15.

THE NEW OBEDIENCE.

At a moment of vital importance in the discussion of the Epistle to the Romans the Apostle's watchword of gratitude is again ready. It is that point at which he is pleading with all his strength for the holiness that must follow the acceptance of justification by faith, and the obligations of the life that is derived from union with the Lord. Death with Christ to sin, life with Christ to righteousness, are the themes of his teaching in the order

of his exposition of the mediatorial work. But at this particular point, when he contemplates the perversion that had begun already to make Christ the minister of sin, his spirit explodes in two characteristic ways. Thinking of those who would argue that, the law being abolished and grace reigning, the believer might be indifferent to sin, he cries, with an emphasis that is better rendered in our English than in the original Greek, indeed with all the might of his mighty nature:—God forbid! Then, turning with deep gratitude to the Romans themselves, worthy illustrations of a better doctrine, and as if at once to release them from every suspicion of sharing that most unchristian thought, he immediately adds the phrase which he never used save under strong excitement: "But God be thanked that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you." As then, so now. Christianity has only God forbid! for every Antinomian; but a deep and heartfelt Thank God! for every example of the new obedience.

Rom. vi. 17.

DELIVERANCE FROM THE BODY OF DEATH.

We take our farewell of St. Paul's ejaculations in that one which is the most personal to himself, and comes home most directly to the hearts of his readers. It is more really an ejaculation than any of the others, as it might be taken out of the text or transferred without any violence. In fact it is, so to speak, a premature earnest or prelude of the greater thanksgiving which fills the next chapter. There is, however, something grand in its abrupt simplicity where it stands, especially if we conform it, with a better reading, to the general type: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" This, the last use of the phrase, returns to the very form of the first.

Rom. vii. 25.

But for what is this gratitude expressed? For the prospect of coming deliverance to his soul in bondage, bound to the body of sin; or to the man under conviction whose

case he here "transfers to himself." And we can understand the strength of the thanksgiving only when we measure the wretchedness of the one chapter and the blessedness of the other, between which it forms a link of transition.

The words immediately preceding our text sum up the seventh chapter: its meaning is condensed in that one exceeding bitter cry, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?" The "I" of the convicted sinner is awakened to a sense of sin and desire for salvation, but awakened only to find himself struggling in a nature which is to him as a body, and so entirely under the bondage of corruption that it might be called a "body of death." This wrestling penitent cries out for his Deliverer: for One whom he knows to be near, and who shall deliver him, not from the body by death, nor from the body as the seat of evil, but from that other self which is as a man of sin within him; One who shall enable him, rescued from the condemnation of the law, to live even in the flesh a sanctified life, free from the law of sin and death. It was this cry which Saul uttered during that ever-memorable time in Damascus; these were the agonies of supplication which his Saviour heard when He said, "Behold, he prayeth." The answer he received at once and for ever; the seventh chapter passed into the eighth in his own experience long before he wrote either. He was delivered by one act of his Redeemer from the body of death, for his sentence was reversed and he lived; from the body of death, inasmuch as his whole being—his spirit and its instrument, his flesh—was inhabited by the Holy Ghost, sin was no longer a necessity of his life; though in the flesh he could please God. He left his Damascus prison with this very song on his lips, and now that he is describing the well-remembered experience, as "a pattern to them that should afterwards believe," he is as it were in haste to tell the secret. Before he has quite

Rom. vii. 24.

Acts ix. 11.

ended the narrative of his sore struggles,—when, after conviction but before the new birth, he was only taught that he could not redeem himself,—he greets the coming Deliverer, as it were before the time: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Not "my Lord:" he writes for us; and Christ is the common Redeemer, both his and ours.

And now we have accomplished our task, and followed in their order these ejaculations of gratitude, so familiar and, we may add, so dear to all hearts. Running our eye backward over the series, we are tempted to group them into a symmetrical whole for which our Apostle gives us no authority. Here are six notes of deep thanksgiving in the Christian life,—if fancy may weave what exposition has gathered,—and the seventh is not yet. The first "Thanks be to God" in every true experience marks the hour of conscious deliverance from the law, its sentence and its bondage: this undertone of gratitude runs through all the rest. The second blesses God for the new obedience, the mould of Christian doctrine into which the regenerate soul is cast to its deep content: it is the gratitude of reflection upon a confirmed regenerate life. The third expresses the ever-increasing sense of the value of the great Redemption, the unspeakable riches of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; the fourth rejoices in witnessing the pure earnestness of Christian zeal in others, the counterpart of our own; the fifth, in this inverted order, rejoices in that stately triumphal procession of Christ in His Gospel through the earth, which, though man observe it not amidst his more engrossing triumphs, is seen of angels, and believed in and shared in by His saints. The sixth, in the gloom of time and the reign of death, sings the great victory that is to come, sings it always, but especially at the grave-side. In due time there will be a seventh "Thanks be to God," which shall swallow up all other songs.

THE PRAYERS.

I. THE ABOUNDING OF CHARITY.
II. ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION.
III. THE GOOD PLEASURE OF GOODNESS.
IV. EVERLASTING CONSOLATION.
V. LOVE AND PATIENCE.
VI. PEACE FROM THE LOVE OF PEACE.
VII. RESTORATION TO CORPORATE PERFECTNESS.
VIII. UNITY.
IX. HOPE.
X. KNOWLEDGE OF THE DIVINE WILL.
XI. FULL ASSURANCE OF KNOWLEDGE.
XII. THE GLORY OF THE INHERITANCE.
XIII. THE INDWELLING TRINITY.
XIV. PERSEVERANCE TO THE DAY OF CHRIST.
XV. THE EVERLASTING COVENANT.

INTRODUCTORY ON THE THESSALONIAN PRAYERS.

THE two Epistles to the Thessalonians are a field peculiarly fruitful for our present purpose. The language as well as the spirit of deep devotion pervades both: formal thanksgivings and supplications are more frequent and occupy a larger space than in any other Epistles. Not indeed that there is any decline in this respect as we proceed with the series. Prayer is the strength of St. Paul's apostolical teaching to the close. But the earliest of his writings are also the richest both in the number and in the importance of their Prayers.

These two Epistles contain, beside other devotional phrases, five express intercessions, the common characteristic of which is that they all bear in them the burden of entire sanctification. Each dwells on one aspect of Christian perfectness, and as a whole they may be said to exhaust the subject, viewed either as to theology or to life. The first connects unblamable holiness with the abounding of charity; the second looks rather at the utmost sanctification of man's whole nature; the third contemplates the accomplishment of the design of grace in internal goodness; the fourth makes the goal of regenerate hope the soul's stability in holiness; while the fifth sums up all in two words, the perfect love of God, and the perfect patience of Christ, into which the Spirit directs the believer as the way of life.

1 Thess. iii. 12, 13.
1 Thess. v. 23.
2 Thess. i. 11, 12.
2 Thess. ii. 16, 17.
2 Thess. iii. 5.

Whilst all these prayers rise to the height of evangelical privilege, the first three are formally dedicated to this by their very construction and phraseology. The full consummation of religious experience is the central idea of each, and in unfolding it almost all the terms which are sacred to Christian perfection are employed. They form a Trilogy of Entire Sanctification, and, deeply interesting

in themselves, their interest is enhanced by the fact that they are the very earliest of the Apostle's Prayers. It is evident that he began his teaching in the highest possible strain, and one that he never relaxed, but kept up in its unfaltering strength to the end. It has been vainly attempted to prove that St. Paul's theological views varied with the advancement of life, but no one has ever been reckless enough to assert that he ever changed his estimate of the possible elevation of man's nature in the present state.

This Trilogy has another point common to its three parts. They all connect finished sanctification with the coming of our Lord and the presence of the Father brought near to the Church in the second advent. This fact must impress its influence, as we shall see, upon the exposition. First, it shows that nothing less than complete purity can be the object desired in these Prayers: it is such integrity of the Christian spirit and character as may sustain the test, the supreme test, of the great day. Secondly, it proves that this integrity was expected as a present blessing of the covenant of grace: for the day of the Lord, used as an argument to diligence and hope, was always regarded as ready to dawn upon the company of Christian believers. The light of that day is supposed to rise upon the sanctity that it tests, and not to create it. From this it follows, further, that these supplications, like all others found in Scripture, should be received by us as indicating our present privilege. Every such prayer is a prayer "with promise." We have our Lord's assurance that all things which are desired for us in the Word of God may be received by us in this present life. If the answer is beyond the reach of faith and hope, or to be attained only in another state, the prayer itself will tell us so. But these unrestricted petitions prescribe the range and the duty also of our expectation. Remembering this axiom let us approach these prayers in their order.

I.

THE ABOUNDING OF CHARITY.

"And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: to the end He may stablish your hearts unblamable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints."—1 THESS. iii. 12, 13.

IN the introduction of this, the first of St. Paul's formal Prayers, some things are worthy of note in relation to the Object to Whom it is presented.

First, our Lord Jesus Christ is expressly addressed: not as the Mediator only, by whom petitions are made acceptable, but as Himself the Hearer, and the Answerer, of prayer. It is true that, in the order and economy of grace, Christ is the Procurer of every blessing, and the Holy Ghost the Administrator. But they err who deny that supplications may be offered to the name of Jesus. St. Paul again and again besought the Lord; generally for himself, but also for the welfare of others and of the whole Church. Here the Saviour is asked first for a temporal and lower gift, for the prosperous direction of the Apostle's course, and then for the highest blessings that man can receive.

At the same time, secondly, it must be observed that our Lord is invoked in the unity of the Father. Literally "in the unity of the Father;" for "God Himself our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ," two Persons, are yet One in the verb "direct." The very grammar faithfully, however insufficiently, expresses their unsearchable Oneness, not only in counsel and act, but in nature and dignity. The taking up of our human nature into the Son's Divine Personality has not impaired the eternal unity of the

Father and the Son. This remarkable Two-one relation occurs again in another of the Thessalonian Prayers: thus it is established by two witnesses, and afterwards the deep anomaly ceases to occur.

2 Thess. ii. 16.

Moreover, it requires only a glance at the construction to observe that here at the outset, as everywhere, there is a latent, and more than latent, reference to the mediatorial Trinity. Who is that Lord who shall stablish the saints before God, even our Father, at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ? It is the Holy Ghost, in the unity of the Father and of the Son, but also in His own administrative function as having our holiness in His charge, and so presiding over our internal redemption as the Lord Jesus presides over our external. Our sanctification in the next Epistle is said to be "of the Spirit." If it be asked, Why then is the Holy Ghost not named? the only answer is that it pleased the Holy Ghost Himself to withhold His name, or to assume here the name of Lord. If any vindication of this answer is needed, it is found in the plain fact that throughout the later New Testament the idea of God is never separated from the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, explicit or implicit. Wherever one Person is mentioned, two other Persons are included; whilst still the Divine nature is one. And when we find, as we often find, a collocation of Three Names,—more we never meet with,—then we must understand the mediatorial Trinity to be meant. It becomes us to accommodate our thoughts to the Divine style, and to catch the spirit of the language of the Holy Ghost. When we have done this, there will remain no difficulty in applying the simple principle. While to us there is but one God,—namely, the one God who is Three-one,—we become familiar with a considerable variation in phraseology, of which this passage is an instance.

2 Thess. ii. 13.

Proceeding to the introduction as such, it further connects the prayer with the preceding thanksgiving. The Apostle has been deeply moved by Timothy's report, which

brought good tidings of his converts' faith and charity, and of their strong desire to see himself. Never to be outdone in love, he responds to this desire by vehement prayer, by supplications urged day and night, that it might please the Lord to speed his way to them. This request he makes permanent in the letter he is writing; and the impulse of affection in his own heart dictates the additional prayer which gives his strong feelings their relief. If he may not visit them at once he can pray for them; and no better thing can he ask than that they may know the might of that charity which fills his own spirit: "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love even as we do towards you!" 1 Thess. iii. 12.

The prayer itself asks for the unlimited abounding of charity, and connects this with the perfection of holiness.

The first blessing invoked in St. Paul's supplication for the Church is charity, that gift of God and grace in man which always has the preeminence. It is the ruling emotion of the regenerate soul, which, assured by its very life of the love of God, goes back to Him directly in devotion, and indirectly in the deeds of charity to man. In love, as in an element, the Apostle prays that they may grow. Not excluding the increase of this grace as making God its object, he here expressly desires the enlargement of their souls in its exercise towards their fellows.

And here at the very threshold of his theology, St. Paul establishes the true character of love as it rests especially on the fellow-elect, and as it embraces all men. This distinction between the particular and the catholic love bears close analogy to the same distinction in the love of God Himself. Both St. Paul and St. Peter find it needful to employ for these distinct terms: and we only follow their example when we draw sharply the line of demarcation between the love of brethren and the love of all. But the distinction, however important, belongs to a lower sphere, and has significance only for a season.

The two graces are one in charity, which is the bond of perfectness; and when the intercession asks for the largest aboundings of charity, it leaves all limitation behind: hence the emphatic addition, "and toward all men."

But what is the specific increase that is prayed for? This will be seen if we consider the vehement language by which he describes it, and the standard he sets up in his own example.

The words "increase and abound" might be interpreted as a compound expression created by St. Paul, as his manner is, to include all that is possible to the capacity of the human heart. But, more closely examined, the former is found to signify rather the growth of the soul in the sphere of charity, and the latter its aboundings in the outward manifestation. It is in love that the soul of the believer must wax: elsewhere love is regarded as growing in us, but here we are regarded as growing in love; which, like faith, is not only a grace within, but also an element around the soul. Having the latter in view, the supplication prays for us that we may be "increased in love," which means that we may become more and more enlarged in heart as our love is enlarged, growing with its growth. The other term by a slight variation makes the sentiment more intense: the "abound" added to the "increase" asks that the evidence of our increase in love may day by day abound and overflow. The phrase very remarkably blends the two ideas of our own growth in the principle and the ever increasing demonstration of our growth to others. But, whatever peculiarity there may be in the words, they are undoubtedly the very strongest that could be selected to signify the unlimited energy of charity to man. Not, however, we must observe again and again, charity to man only. The continuation in the next chapter shows this: for there, when the Apostle speaks of love to to our fellow Christians as "taught of God," he calls it

"philadelphia," only a branch of charity, though never separable from that other love that belongs to God. So here, while love to man is supplicated in its large aboundings, it is regarded only as springing from the abundant effusion of the love of God. He now uses the larger and more comprehensive word: and thus while he speaks of love to man, he includes love to God. For both and together are the fruit of Divine Grace. 1 Thess. iv. 9.

The Apostle presents his own example as at once a standard, a guide, and an incentive. He does not mean, "and may He make us also abound towards you:" the turn of his phrase expressly avoids this, and declares that he knew himself, that he felt himself, to be continually expanding in the habit and exercises of that love which "puffeth not up," but "edifieth," which enlarges and strengthens the spiritual nature not in apearance only, but in reality. This is the first instance of a practice of the writer with which we soon become familiar: that of commending his own example to the believers whom he exhorts. Nowhere in his writings is the abounding self-sacrifice of his love more vividly exhibited than here. The same Spirit whose influence led him to propose hinself as a pattern, or at least as an illustration, of true charity, gave him the perfect self-devotion which breathes in all his words. Let the collective strength of the previous expressions be again adverted to: they present to us an absolutely perfect description of self-forgetting charity. Love runs through the whole round of its emotions, and spends almost all that it has to give, from the tenderness of the nursing mother to the devotion which sacrifices life. It begins in verse five, where the Apostle speaks of his anxiety about their safety as all but intolerable. The glad tidings that they had resisted the tempter was to him strength for the endurance of his own temptations: indeed,—and what could go beyond this!—their prosperity was the very life of his soul. Then comes the rapture of 1 Cor. viii. 1.

1 Thess. iii. 9. gratitude: "what thanks can we render to God again for you!" and the daily and nightly prayer that the work of the Gospel may bring him near the Thessalonians; that he may behold their face, and fill up the deficiencies of their faith by a personal colloquy that might teach more affectionately, and at the same time more effectually, than a letter. There is more than human sympathy here. Lu. vii. 47. Having had "much forgiven," the Apostle "loved much." This is the first time that he opens his heart to us, and we may well stand amazed at the perfection of charity which we behold. But while we are pondering the exhibition, and calling to mind how that consummate charity was manifested through a life of self-sacrifice even unto death, 1 Thess. iii. 12. we hear his intercession diverting us from himself: "the Lord make you to abound in love, even as we do."

The connection between this abounding love and unblamable holiness is one of the most important topics in experimental theology. "To the end that" has here its full force: the petitioner is not adding to his supplication in what follows, but showing the reason for which he urged his request, and the ultimate consequence of its attainment. Confirmation in holiness of heart is the immediate result of abounding love; unblamable holiness is the result as connected with the coming of Christ; and establishment in that perfection of perfect and blameless love is the eternal result. However swiftly these gradations passed through the writer's mind, and however firmly they are blended into one, we cannot gather all his meaning unless we take them separately.

Love, whether regarded in its unity, or divided into devotion and charity, is the energy of all holiness; the law in man's heart by which the Holy Ghost effects our sanctification. By it we are entirely released from sin: not, indeed, by the power of love in itself, but by love as the instrument of the Spirit in expelling every impure and sinful affection. The soul in which the Divine love is shed

abroad in its fulness can give no place to evil desires; this is a light which leaves no part dark,—a law, royal in its authority, that allows nothing rebellious to remain. By it, also, we are strengthened into complete obedience; for "love is the fulfilling of the law." The answer of St. Paul's prayer involves nothing less than the sovereign control of a principle that permits no duty to be neglected, no commandment to be disobeyed, no offence against man to be conceived or spoken or done, no method of pleasing God to be forgotten. There is no limit to the increase of this love. St. Paul has in this, his first prayer for charity, chosen two terms that spurn restriction. Now this fact teaches us, on the one hand, that an absolutely perfected love—perfected, that is, in the sense of having reached an impassable limit—there cannot be either in time or in eternity; the love of God to man can never be spent, nor can man's return of love to God. But it teaches us, also, on the other hand, that there is nothing in the heart of man that shall resist it: its abounding shall fill his heart, and its overflow his life, even unto a relative if not absolute perfection. Hence the holiness the confirmation of which the Apostle prays for is, strictly interpreted, a state of sanctification in which man's heart, that is, man himself, is already established by the power of God.

Ro. xiii. 10.

The idea of confirmation in unblamable holiness before God, even our Father, carries the view forward to that day which is the vanishing point of all the lines of the Apostle's theology and hope. Here it is the awful idea of the inquisition of the Searcher of hearts that is impressed upon our minds. The confirmed holiness that is the concomitant, or result, of perfected love is supposed to be brought under the more direct scrutiny of God, who, always present as the Judge in His house, will come nearer, yea, infinitely near, in that dreadful day. It is brought before Him; it is not created by His coming: neither does death destroy the body of sin, nor the ap-

pearing of Christ perfect the holy love of His saints. Our
Col. i. 22. exposition must not falter here. "Holy and unblamable and unreprovable in His sight" is a saying which sinful man hears with amazement and fear: he is too ready to think it beyond human attainment. That "all the saints" bring their finished holiness to compare with that of men, and that even by their side the sanctity of believers is still unimpeached, is impressive, but adds nothing to the thought. Enough that the eye of Supreme Justice will regard the saints made perfect in love as unblamable in holiness. Unblamable; for charity reigning in the heart shall achieve a perfect fulfilment of the evangelical law. Justice shall be satisfied, and mercy rejoice. And this is the state of holiness to which we are called: to the fulness of that charity which, shed abroad by the Spirit, covers, not by hiding, but by destroying, our multitude of sins; through Jesus Christ, "Who shall also confirm us to the end,"—
1 Cor. i. 8. not at the end, but from this time to the end,—that we "may be blameless in the day of our Lord."

Once more, the construction of the Apostle's sentence allows us, if indeed it does not require us, to interpret his prayer as asking that we may be at the coming of Christ, and by the coming of Christ, confirmed in our unchangeable condition of holiness before God. Let us note carefully what is then to be confirmed, and what the confirmation means. It is not the establishment of an uncertain character; for the abounding of love has already accomplished that. It is not the establishment in brotherly love; that is a grace which, strictly speaking, and as one of the branches of charity, may be supposed to end with time. But it is the establishment of the unblamable holiness of perfect love; and that establishment itself is the confirmation of the soul in a state that can never know change,—in other words, it is the seal and end of what we mean by probation. A few words may be necessary on each of these points.

The holiness of perfect love is the permanent character of the saved. Love abideth; and without holiness none can see the Lord. Of nothing else it is said that it abides, and will abide for ever. Holiness is the consummation of all that religion has to accomplish for the soul in its sanctification from sin and its consecration to God. And love is, and will ever be, the law of heaven as well as the law of earth. Faith, confirmed till the day of Christ, will cease as the principle of holiness when it shall have lost by finding its highest object, an unseen God. Hope in its relation to holiness shall cease; for, though the spirit will go on to higher glory, it will never know that there is a future before it: it will never be conscious of an object waited for.

This establishment implies the end of probation. That is to say, as death ends the soul's probation, so the coming of Christ without death will end it. Not only will the great day diffuse the glory of sight over the dimness of faith, and make all the objects and experiences of religion more vivid, it will also stereotype them for ever.

With the day of the Lord the order of probation vanishes. It vanishes to the individual in death, but to the Church, and to man's history generally, only at the coming of Christ. Then—not till then, but assuredly then—all that belongs to the warfare, and suspense, and growing victory of religion shall cease. We shall be established eternally. All that a probationary condition has had of dread shall terminate; but nothing more effectually than that probation itself, with the whole family of terms that belong to it. Phenomena shall be lost in eternal reality. With the abolition of sin, trial also and the possibility of change shall be abolished. Rest in God shall be the law of heaven; and that rest shall be movement in an orbit around the throne that shall never be perturbed.

What remains in the prayer is subordinate, and, so to speak, not of its essence. The Lord's coming with all His

saints will have for its object many things that need not enter into this exposition. It will be the gathering into one of all the fruits of the Mediatorial work: the saints disembodied shall come with Jesus to receive their bodies, to join those sanctified like themselves, to blend into fellowship around the Lord for ever. And Christian "saints" must needs include the angels: they will be present at the end, as they have never been absent from the beginning. Our brethren in heaven shall not be perfect without us; nor shall either we or they be perfected without the angels. The Lord will bring all His saints: all, namely, whom heaven already has; but we ourselves must be added to make the "all" in its fullest sense complete.

What shall follow we need not now ask. The one theme of this beginning of the Prayers of Paul the Apostle is enough for us: the perfect fulness of love, bringing in a holiness which shall be found unblamable and as such confirmed in the day of Christ.

II.

ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION.

"And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it."—1 THESS. v. 23, 24.

THE first thing that arrests attention when we approach this prayer is its position. It is the only one, save that in the Hebrews, which forms a conclusion; and this gives it a specific character. We perceive its full meaning, and feel its full force, only when we read ourselves into it as the end of the whole Epistle. As such, it is, so to speak, the natural close of a most impressive course of precept and exhortation. Sanctification from all sins had been again and again urged, but especially from those which most emphatically express the defilement and loathsomeness of sin. Sanctification, in its positive sense, as the energy of love, the strength of the new life, commanding through the will man's entire being, and going forth towards all that is outside of self, had been inculcated and prayed for, but especially with regard to fellow-Christians and fellow-men. And now all previous petitions are gathered up into one. The Epistle ends with a prayer for absolute and unrestricted sanctification: for a sanctification negative and positive, perfect in whole, and perfect in parts, at once consummate and progressive, confirmed for time and for eternity.

This emphasis becomes if possible more marked when we regard the prayer as the close of the strain immediately preceding. As far back as the fifteenth verse we perceive the signs of a very strong emotion in the

Apostle's spirit. There the idea of love, vanquishing all evil and pursuing all good, stirs his soul. His exhortations become very bold, and each of them bears the burden of perfection. Nowhere have we in the same compass so many wonderful precepts. The words are few, the sentences are hurried and condensed, but they are "exceeding broad." We are prepared for the grandeur of the prayer that follows by the grandeur of its introduction. When we come to the verge of the supplication itself we cannot but feel that the Apostle is about to ask some great thing. Precept never laid a stronger obligation on human energy, and never put a higher honour on human ability, than when it says: "Test all things, hold fast all that is good, and keep back from every form of evil." Precisely at that point, when man's ambition to be perfect has been stimulated to the utmost, the transition is made from what we can do for ourselves to what God must do for us: "But may the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly!"

1 Thess. v. 21,22.

1 Thess. v. 23.

In several respects this prayer is peculiar, and may be said to stand alone.

Its phraseology is from beginning to end unique: all save the invocation of the "God of Peace," and the reference to the coming of the Lord, which indeed belong to the mere framework of the petitions, and, when closely examined, are not without their own marks of distinctness. The expressions which compose the fabric of the prayer—"sanctify," "wholly," "whole," "spirit and soul and body," "preserved blameless," "faithful Caller," "who will do"—are each and all very emphatic, and do not occur again in the devotional language of the Apostle. It has been remarked before that his prayers are full of variety; and that each is stamped with its own characteristics. But this one has more than the usual individuality: it is marked off from the rest in a way not to be mistaken. It has more of the old temple spirit and temple phraseology in it than any of those which follow; and exhibits

more affinity with the Epistle to the Hebrews than with any of St. Paul's other writings.

This at once suggests a comparison with the greatest of all recorded supplications, the highpriestly consecration-prayer in St. John. Though this Apostle was not one of those who companied with the Lord Jesus, and the Gospels were not yet written, some of his devotions contain remarkable reminiscences of the Saviour's words, and all of them are fashioned after the "manner" that He taught His disciples. As an instance, we shall hereafter compare the cast of the Ephesian prayer with the "Our Father." In the present case we have only to hint at the resemblance to the Lord's supplications for His disciples before He left them. The reader will pursue the parallel with ease. There can be no better preparation for our present study than a careful perusal of the highpriestly prayer: there we have the ground or source of all New-Testament doctrine concerning sanctification. "I sanctify Myself that they also might be sanctified"—is the key to the whole sacred mystery. The Divine consecration, separating believers from the world, while keeping them blameless in it; having its end, on the one hand, in the unity of the mystical body in holiness, and on the other, in the vision of Christ's glory at His coming: and brought to its perfection by the Righteous or Faithful God of the Christian vocation;—these form a series of ideas which are common to the Lord and the writer of this Prayer. One might almost suppose that St. Paul had been lingering between the Paschal chamber and Gethsemane, and heard these words. But no such supposition is needed. The sayings of that last evening had long been the commnon heritage; and we know that all of them had been made matter of special revelation to Christ's latest Apostle.

Jno. xvii. 19.

The Saviour's prayer for our sanctification, however, was in some respects very different from that of His servant. His intercession was the utterance of His

I will," based upon the fulfilment of His redeeming obligation. And while to His Father it was the expression of His eternal will, as now shared and enforced by His human heart, to us it is Divine teaching as to the connection between His sanctification and ours. He offered, through the eternal Spirit of His Divinity, the spotless sacrifice of His flesh for our redemption; we only present ourselves, that we may be sanctified from sin and then consecrated by the Divine Spirit of God, being made "partakers of His holiness." He sanctified Himself; and, in virtue of that sanctification, He sanctifies us also. His Spirit uses as His instrument the truth of redemption, which is the Word of the Gospel; but the sanctification itself has its ground in the union with Christ which He effects. That union gives to our faith the virtue of His sacrifice; we are justified and sanctified from guilt and condemnation. It gives to our faith also the virtue of His life: sprinkled and accepted in Him we receive His Spirit as the source and the power of our anointing unto holiness. As "we are in Him" we are justified and sanctified from the defilement that would hinder consecration; as "He is in us" we are sanctified unto all holiness of devotion and obedience. But this distinction must be effaced as soon as it is made. The Holy Spirit of Christ imparted to us unites the two ideas in one: He first sanctifies us from the defilement of unpardoned sin, purging the conscience; and the consecration thus rendered possible He effects, dedicating us to the service of the living God. Such is briefly the connection between the original text in the Gospel and the expanded doctrine in the Epistles.

Heb. xii. 10.

The expressions by which God is invoked in St. Paul's prayers always contain important helps for their interpretation. Here there are three, each very significant in itself, and all still more significant in their order. "The God of peace" is the Author of reconciliation accomplished

through the atoning mediation of Christ; "He that calleth" is the Father who calls, and is ever calling, the individual soul to Christ and to salvation; the Sanctifier "who will do" what He hath promised is the Finisher of that which began in the call to appropriate the peace. The God of a finished redemption summons every one to the enjoyment of reconciliation and to the perfect holiness of the Christian life.

It is only the "God of peace" who calls to sanctification: that is, those only are sanctified, or can be sanctified, who have entered into the enjoyment of the Divine favour. God here receives a new designation. This great word "peace" received a new and deeper meaning at the cross; and from that time God has added it to His many names. "Righteous Father," "Holy Father," were the terms by which our Lord invoked the God of redemption; those names He bears still,—they can never be changed,—but now He delights to be known as the "God of grace," the "Father of mercies," the "God of peace." He calls every sinner who repents to come to Him as the God of reconciliation; and the believer pardoned not only receives the assurance of relief from the Divine displeasure, but enters into a state of habitual fellowship with a reconciled Father. Peace begins the state of grace, peace pervades it, and peace is its perfection. And thus the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ takes this name as the Giver of every blessing that flows through the reconciliation of the atonement to redeemed man. Rom. v. 1.

"He that calleth" is a designation that seldom occurs: never again in the phraseology of prayer. Generally the calling of God is referred to the past, marking the influence of the Spirit through the word at the season of conversion. Sometimes, as we shall soon see, it refers to the final issue; and the calling is to the kingdom and glory of Christ. Here, however, it is the continuous and abiding call between the two extremes that is meant: we 1 Thess. v. 24.

are called, always called, "unto holiness." It is not signified that God derives this name from the fact that it is He who invites us to Himself in the Gospel; but the expression affectingly reminds us that the design of the vocation is always an entire holiness, and that we are called to it always. It is a remembrancer made, every time we hear it, of an abiding obligation on our part, of a constant will on the part of God. He that is now and ever calling us is calling us to perfect sanctification. And, as every vocation implies a promise, the Apostle adds, "Faithful is He that calleth," who will not fail to do His part, requiring only fidelity on ours. It is not "who calleth" simply, but "who calleth you."

The third name is not mentioned, but implied in the prayer. God is the only Sanctifier of His saints. The word itself, with the whole class of phrases that it governs, belongs to Him alone. It is God that justifieth: no less is it God that sanctifieth. We have no right to adopt either of these terms to signify anything that we can do; and it is only a lax religious phraseology that speaks of man's sanctifying or consecrating himself. Whenever the Scriptures speak of our part in this matter, other terms are carefully employed: a wide range of them is at our command. Words we have for duty and virtue in every form; for the formation of character and the performance of good works; even for the washing and cleansing of ourselves. But this word "sanctify" belongs to God, and must itself be sanctified or set apart from our common use. One only could say, "I sanctify Myself!"

John xvii. 19.

The importance of this is silently impressed upon us by the turn of the phrase when the sublime prayer begins. "The very God of peace" is language hallowed in multitudes of hearts; and no revision will efface it from the current language, at least of this generation. It must, however, be rightly understood. What the Apostle means is: "But, whilst you are doing all that men can do to

gain perfection, up to the point of testing all, cleaving to the good, and eschewing evil in every appearance that it may or can assume, may God Himself, Who alone can do this, 'sanctify you wholly'!" The Father is the Sanctifier: "Sanctify them through Thy truth!" The Son is the Sanctifier: "He that sanctifieth, and they that are sanctified, are all of one." But preeminently the Holy Ghost is the Sanctifier: "Through sanctification of the Spirit." Each Person of the Holy Three-in-One; but God alone.

John xvii. 17. Heb. ii. 11. 2 Thess. ii. 13.

Entering now into the prayer itself, we mark its great central idea, the entireness of personal sanctification; and we shall better apprehend this if we rigidly confine ourselves, as the words confine us, to that one idea. But it will be well to consider first what kind of entireness is not meant.

There is a sense in which all accepted believers are of necessity entirely sanctified:—they are absolutely washed from the guilt of their sins; their hearts are sprinkled from an evil conscience; and that defilement which must needs hinder the Divine acceptance, is not seen in them or imputed to them. This ancient Levitical meaning of the word comes up with it out of the Old Testament, and never altogether forsakes it, at least in the language of Scriptural theology. It is thus applied throughout the Epistle to the Hebrews, and, with a certain change, in St. John's Epistles. As the sprinkling of typical blood, and the washing of typical water, sanctified to the purifying of the flesh, so the better blood and the purer water of the Gospel purged the conscience and washed the spiritual body of the sacrifice. In this sense, sanctification is one with justification: they meet and go together for a season before they widely separate. The soul that is justified in the forum or in the court mediatorial, is in the temple and before the altar sanctified. Now this sanctification is always entire, even as justification is always complete: "By one offering, He hath perfected for ever

Heb. x. 22.

Heb. x. 14.

them that are sanctified." We shall return to this truth in the sequel: meanwhile, it is enough to say here that such a meaning of sanctification does not enter—or enters only as subordinate—into the Apostle's prayer.

In another sense, also, believers in Christ may be said to be entirely sanctified. They are presented to God upon an altar which makes everything holy that touches it; and thus they are set apart, consecrated, and devoted to the Divine service. The seal impressed on Christians marks them out as the Lord's. They are His whose Spirit they receive. Now that consecration to God must be, in a certain sense, absolute, if it exist at all. The offering must be either on the altar or not on the altar. Accordingly, much of the language of Scripture speaks of the redeemed as entirely sanctified to God. But it is not this sanctification, common to all regenerate Christians, that the Apostle prays for. The oblation placed on the altar is altogether destined for God, and therefore is and must be wholly dedicated; but it has yet to go up to heaven in the consuming fire as a whole burnt-offering.

Once more, there is a sanctification of the elect in the mind and purpose of God which may be said to be entire. They are complete in Christ, according to the foreknowledge of God: in the Divine intention the saving process has already reached its end. "Whom He justified, them He also glorified." "He hath perfected for ever them that are in process of being sanctified." Christ is of God made to them "wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." The whole round of evangelical blessing is the inheritance of the sanctified who persevere. The patience of Divine grace waits till the great end is attained; and meanwhile the prescience of Divine love rejoices over the foreknown as already perfectly sanctified. But of any such ideal in the Divine mind the Apostle does not think in this prayer.

Rom. viii. 30. Heb. x. 14. 1 Cor. i. 30.

These several views of entire holiness unite in one

element, that of imputation. But the Apostle's prayer uses a word which takes us into an altogether different region: "Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it." St. Paul does not pray that God may reckon the Thessalonians to be sanctified; that He may constantly impute to them the principle of consecration, or that He may bring them finally to the perfect holiness that His Divine mind foresees. He prays that God may accomplish within them a work of all-pervading sanctification, according to His unfailing promise, and by the virtue of His all-sufficient power.

The entireness of the sanctification here prayed for is expressed in two ways: first, it is a complete consecration of the whole person or being of the Christian; and, secondly, it is the preservation of the same integral person in a state of blamelessness till the coming of Christ. These we must consider in order; but before doing so, it will be well to obviate some objections arising out of the form and construction of the sentence.

It has been, or it might be, said that the words used by the Apostle are too rare and too uncertain in their meaning to permit their being made the foundation of a doctrine so important as that which is sometimes based upon them. But, granted that they are unusual—scarcely occurring again—it cannot be proved that they are indefinite in their signification. On the contrary, they are chosen with extreme precision, and bear their sense in their very form. Passing by this, two other preliminary objections, based upon this one, must in few words be obviated.

The first takes the form of an honourable explanation, though not a sound one. This assumes that the term "wholly" must refer to the sanctification of the entire body of Thessalonians; while blamelessness is afterwards supplicated for each individual in his "wholeness," or integrity. The sense thus yielded is a beautiful one, and quite in harmony with our Saviour's prayer for the unity

of believers in holiness. But, apart from the difference in the expression between the Lord's words and St. Paul's, there is no instance of any individual community as such being regarded or prayed for as capable of entire sanctification: that blessedness is the prerogative of either the whole mystical Church or the individual Christian.

The other less worthy subterfuge simply asserts that what seems to be the plain meaning of the terms must not be unduly pressed. It is alleged that here and elsewhere the Apostle is "very bold," and his language is not to be too nicely measured and weighed; that he does not always restrain his enthusiasm and pause to select the "words of truth and soberness;" that his theology ought not to be made responsible for his exuberant phrases; that it is not right to found dogmas from which human self-knowledge revolts upon occasional unlimited terms, especially when those terms are used by one whose grandest passages owe their sublimity to an unmatched use of the rhetorical hyperbole. This is the style in which a loose theory of inspiration speaks; it furnishes a canon for interpreting the Bible which is only too readily adopted by indolence and unbelief; and the result is that the glory of Scriptural ethics vanishes before it. Whatever else may be said in condemnation of this theory of indeterminateness in St. Paul's diction, it is enough here to point to the words that lead the van and bring up the rear of this text. It begins and it ends with the power of God. And with regard to the latter, "Faithful is He," it is remarkable that this pithy formula is with hardly an exception used precisely on those occasions when the strength of the Apostle's language might seem to demand the confirmation or the sanction of a special Divine guarantee.

1 Thess. v. 24.

Taking then, first, the entireness of sanctification as an end attained, we must mark well two things: first, there is a consecrating act of God put forth to the utmost

necessary point; and, secondly, that concentrating force pervades the whole being of man.

It is the function, act, and energy of the Holy Ghost—"the God of peace"—applied through the truth to the centre of man's nature, or rather to his entire being. The work is one of Divine power, a work which God begins, continues, and brings to perfection: He "will do it." The prayer gives all the glory to God: man is supposed in his finished holiness to be "filled with the Spirit." Now this separates our sanctification from any and every disciplinary self-consecration which man by his own effort may attain. It is not the result of a new direction or impetus given to our faculties; it is through no energy of the self-consecrating will; through no contemplation of the illuminated reason; through no mighty outgoings of the regenerate feeling. There is a power above and behind all these: using them, indeed, each and all, but not leaving the recovery of holiness to them. It is not the moral agent retrieving himself by Divine aid, but a new and more abundant life infused and sustained and brought to perfection, within man's own being indeed, but by a power above it. Here is the test of all systems of theology, of all schools of interpretation, of all views of evangelical privilege.

Eph. v. 18.

The sanctifying power of God pervades man's whole being: it extends to all the elements of his nature, "the whole;" and it sanctifies them "wholly," as belonging to one indivisible person. Thus this doctrine of sanctification is in strict harmony with the general teaching of Scripture, literal or figurative, which describes the end of religion as gradually attained. Let it be at once observed, however, that the entireness of sanctification is not said of each of the parts of our triple constitution, as such, but only of the whole as combined.

The spirit of man is sanctified, and in it the process really has its origin and its perfection. Man's spirit is that

element of his nature which is not only his preeminence but his distinction also. In that he is only a little lower than the angels, and lower than they only for a season; in that he has no fellowship whatever with the lower creation. There is the seat of the Divine image in man, an image which may be marred but never can be lost. The perfect restoration of that image belongs to a future economy, where entire sanctification is swallowed up in glory. Meanwhile the spirit is consecrated from sin and sense and unto God in all its faculties. The reason is filled with truth, and becomes a mirror capable of reflecting the Divine image, an eye that can in everything see God: not glorified as yet, not healed of all its infirmities, but entirely dedicated to its one original and long-forgotten function, that of being the depository of the supreme first principles of goodness, rectitude, and truth. The conscience—using that term in its improper sense as including not only the moral consciousness but the standard to which it appeals—is sanctified unto perfect fidelity as an internal legislator true to the truth, as an incorruptible witness pacified, and as an interpreter of the Divine judgment delivered from all fear. And the will is sanctified: not raised, indeed, to its utmost strength; but consecrated wholly, and deepening in its consecration as knowledge widens; altogether sanctified as the servant of its own supreme choice and intention, and as the master of all its own acts; sanctified by release from every impediment of unholy motives, and by the constant influence of the truth applied by the Spirit: the impulse behind it, the end before it, and all its means between the two, consecrated in the unity of one supreme principle—the glory of God. But we are apt to lose the noblest meaning of the term "spirit" if we exchange it for these synonymes. It is the element in man's nature which is turned to God and capable of God. Dead or asleep in the unregenerate it is quickened into life by the Holy Spirit; and when it

is entirely possessed by Him who quickens it — the "spiritual" man being "filled with the Spirit," and wholly spiritual—it is wholly sanctified to the vision of God: not indeed as yet to a direct intuitional contemplation of God —though a high state of this contemplation is possible even on earth—but to a state in which God is seen in all things, and all things are seen in God. This entire sanctification of the spirit "passeth understanding:" not only as being undefinable to human thought, but as belonging to that sphere of man's nature which is above or outside of the discerning faculty. "He that is joined unto the Lord is one Spirit." 1 Cor. vi. 17.

The soul is consecrated also as distinct from the spirit, though altogether subordinate to it. The soul in Scriptural phrase—that is, when mentioned apart from the human spirit where the Divine Spirit's seat is—comes between the higher and the lower elements of our being. It is the sphere of the desires and passions, which are innocent in themselves, but transformed by the sinful will into worldly affections and lusts; which are restored, however, to their original innocence by being brought under the control of the Holy Ghost through the will, refusing them their unholy stimulants and nourishment in the world. The soul partakes both of the spirit and of the body. As allied to both and uniting them it is the sphere of those processes of understanding and feeling of which animals below us exhibit the traces; and which, so to speak, the spirit conducts through the medium of the bodily organisation. Linked with the infirm brain and heart and members, the soul can attain to only a negative perfection. Its glorification has yet to come; but by the Divine grace its almost innumerable faculties of perception and feeling and action may be and must be brought under the supreme ascendency of the sanctifying Spirit.

The body is also sanctified, as the instrument of spirit

and soul, and as an integral and everlasting part of man's nature. In the former sense its consecration is bound up with that of the soul: a holy soul uses all the members and functions of the body holily. But our prayer means more than that. The body of the Christian is consecrated in virtue of the Incarnation. Though only material and doomed to dissolution, it is a "holy thing:" in fact, as the vehicle through which the spirit and the soul act, it has more abundant honour put upon it: for of what besides the body is it said that it is "the temple of the Holy Ghost?" But, like the spirit and the soul, and still more than they, its sanctification is limited; postponed, as it were, till that day when its hour shall have come, and its sanctification and glorification shall be one.

1 Cor. vi. 19.

The entireness of the consecration, "wholly," has reference to the person made up of these constituents. The Christian is entirely sanctified when he in his triune personality is absolutely dedicated to God. The three parts of our nature are not introduced in order to show that holiness becomes perfect by proceeding through these inwardly towards the centre. The process is precisely the opposite of this. The sanctification is of the man, in whom spirit and soul and body unite: it begins with the self of "the inner man," made now "the new man," that governs all. Sin destroyed, and love perfect, in the inner man, the rest follows. The Holy Ghost, dwelling in that renewed self, becomes a will within the will that rules the whole; and when He has confirmed that will in its supreme devotion to God sanctification is entire. Perfect love in the will concentrates the strength of the mind, and of the soul, and of the body, on God alone. The Spirit of holiness unites the triple consecration into one. He makes the heart or inner man a temple, the sanctity of which is diffused from the human spirit, which is man's holiest, through his soul which connects him with the body, and the body which connects him with the world of sense.

This leads directly to the second part of the prayer for entire holiness, that which asks for continuance in such a state. Here, indeed, is the point where the main difficulty lies, and which therefore demands to be very carefully examined. But the language of the Apostle is so clear and express, that the expositor who does not take counsel of fear will not go astray. It suggests three subjects of consideration. First, the same power that sanctifies as an act preserves that sanctification as a state. Secondly, the state of holiness is one that admits of no defect: "the whole" of the spirit, and soul, and body is the Lord's. Thirdly, the consecration is such as, in the judgment of God Himself, is "blameless." Let us mark these in their order.

Entire sanctification, as distinguished from sanctification simply so termed, may be regarded as the confirmed, habitual, no longer interrupted devotion of the whole being to God. As the power that created the world sustains it by an abiding and omnipresent indwelling energy, so the power that can fix upon God the strength of the whole soul can keep it fixed on Him. In wholly sanctified spirits this establishing grace reigns; and that is the distinction between them and others, between them and their former selves. It is the concentrated devotion of all to God made permanent that makes the difference. A strong influence of grace descending in answer to prayer at an opportune moment may carry the whole soul to God for a season: may exclude every other thought from the mind, still every alien feeling in the soul, and draw the entire will into conformity with the will of God. This may often be the case for a time, and during strong excitement; but not so often is their continuance in such a state. When the prayer of faith that brings this blessing becomes unceasing in its fervent and effectual inwrought power, this act of intense devotion becomes the tranquil state of the soul.

But how does the prayer of faith grow so mighty? Not without the use of effectual means; but to them this present apostolic prayer does not directly point our attention. Suffice to say that habitual faith working by habitual love and sustained by habitual hope brings the
Eph. i. 19. "exceeding greatness of the Divine power" into the life. But that power uses the means of its own appointment. Nourished by the word of God, which is God Himself, "all things are possible" to faith. Supposing the faith to grow weak, or to be suspended, sanctification ceases to be entire. "By faith we stand" upon these heights of the "hill of the Lord." And He who is faithful is "able to keep us from falling."

The consecration of the Christian is the preservation of all that belongs to his spirit, and to his soul, and to his body blameless in the fellowship and in the service of God. The whole man becomes entirely the Lord's as His property and worshipper; the whole man becomes entirely the Lord's as His instrument and servant. Hence entire sanctification is the habitual communion with God as the supreme good of the soul; and the habitual reference of every act to the will and glory of God as the Lord of life. All this is not expressly stated in our prayer; we must therefore not linger upon it. But it is necessarily implied, and we must not pass it by altogether. The one principle of entire consecration, which is faith in the power of God working by love, keeps the spirit and soul faithful to God as the supreme object of worship and source of happiness. The whole heart is given to Him. No satisfaction is sought for the intellect, the affections, or the desires apart from Him. Love makes the whole being a whole burnt offering: a sacrifice that for ever burns, but is never consumed; and the spirit that is preserved in this undivided allegiance to the Supreme Good is conscious of its high choice, and rests in it: "All my springs are in Thee." But, whilst there is such satisfying communion

with God and perfect fellowship with Him, the sanctified soul is also consecrated to His service. Love takes order for this also; and, by the mystery of its divine cunning, makes the man who is always sanctifying his God in the temple of his own heart a never-weary servant of God in the activity of probation. It stamps upon every action of life, from its highest labours and sacrifices down to the least movement of the least member of the body, the character of consecration to the Holy One. All is done with a conscious or latent aim to glorify Him. Life has no higher perfection than this; and he who is preserved in this state is wholly sanctified. All the aspirations of devotion, all the claims of charity, all the obligations of obedience, may, through the energy of this self-renouncing love, be reached, be responded to, and be discharged. This love, this ever-necessary charity, the bond of perfectness, we have been obliged to import into this prayer from that which precedes. We cannot expound such language as this without it; and, by an appeal to its power, we may explain what in these words seems too high for human nature. Love is the fulfilling of the law: the perfection of worship, the energy of all obedience, the sufficient strength of all duty to God and man.

And this state of entire consecration is lastly preserved in "blamelessness." So wonderful is this word, that we instinctively ask whether its meaning is not fainter than its sound. But the more closely we question it, the more stedfastly does it affirm that it is even so. It is literally and nothing less than "blameless" or "unblameworthy."

Returning to the meaning of sanctification with which we set out, this word "blameless" must signify of course that no blame is imputed. The wholly sanctified are preserved in a state of acceptance as continually sprinkled or washed or cleansed—for all these terms are used—by the virtue of the atoning blood. The Fountain opened once for all sends its precious current for ever over their

soul. But the word means more than that. The high priest so entirely consecrates the offering to God, that the whole spirit and soul and body, the three-one oblation, is a faultless sacrifice. Sin is no longer found in it. It is impossible honestly to argue away this explanation of the word. Exposition must accept it: reverently, submissively, thankfully accept it. And it is confirmed in that acceptance by calling to mind the only two other occasions on which our nature is divided as it is here. Both passages represent man's being as in the temple and ready for the altar. One divides the spirit and the body; and the body presented by the spirit as the representative of a whole life dedicated to God is supposed to be a "living, holy, and acceptable sacrifice." The other divides the spirit and soul; and there the sacred scrutiny is described as piercing to the "thoughts and intents of the heart,"—the keenest imaginable exhibition of the Divine requirement in the soul that God accepts. With this full in his thought, St. Paul nevertheless prays that the Thessalonians may be preserved blameless in the sacrifice of spirit and soul and body. No wonder that the living souls thus wholly sanctified are supposed to be unblamable at the coming of the Lord Jesus. Test can go no further.

Rom. xii. 1.

Heb iv. 12.

The fidelity of God is pledged to the accomplishment of this. "Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do—!" What will He do? This the prayer sublimely leaves unexpressed. But the word that begins the sentence gives us the clue to the Apostle's exact meaning. It is not simply that God is mighty, and will achieve the full sanctification of His saints. He is faithful: this implies His covenant, and the promises of His covenant, and not less its conditions. Sanctification and obedience are continually conjoined by all the Apostles: that obedience being the obedience of love and also of faith. If we yield ourselves up with all our heart to the will of

God, and "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit," His promise shall be fulfilled in a perfected holiness. But it is faith rather than obedience that Scripture directly connects with our finished sanctification. The Faithful Caller demands faith in the called. This most wonderful prayer becomes a most unlimited promise, the superscription of which is, "According to your faith be it unto you." 2 Cor. vii. 1.

III.

THE GOOD PLEASURE OF GOODNESS.

"Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power: that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."—2 THESS. i. 11, 12.

AT the point where this intercessory prayer rises out of the text we see exemplified St. Paul's manner of giving a devotional turn to every subject, especially to every difficult or transcendent subject. He has been contemplating the day of the Lord: as if present he witnesses the glorification of God in the punishment of the wicked and in the salvation of the saints. With a graceful combination of courtesy and charity he assumes that the Thessalonians are among the latter: saved "because our testimony among you was believed." But whilst he is telling them this a change passes over his mind. The language of exultation and confidence becomes the language of hope; and hope takes refuge in supplication. Prophecy glides into prayer:—that God may graciously count them worthy of so high a dignity; that He may also make them worthy of it; and that He may crown their imputed and imparted worthiness with glory at the last.

There is no room for doubt that the translation "count worthy" literally expresses the Apostle's meaning. His prayer afterwards includes in its object the Thessalonians' actual meetness for glorification as accomplished by the Divine power; but here at first he thinks only of the

condescending grace that will confirm to the end a vocation resting only on an imputed worthiness, or rather upon a worthiness that God imparts solely through grace. The term has a rigorous reference to the Divine estimation which runs parallel with the creation of goodness within us. God is emphatically, as we have seen, "He that calleth:" and His calling is, from beginning to end, the invitation of undeserving sinners to the enjoyment of His grace and glory. The call is one; but it may be viewed under three aspects, or rather in a threefold gradation; and in each the honour is conferred upon man as unworthy in himself, but reckoned worthy through the grace of Christ.

The first call, to the fellowship of the blessings of salvation in the kingdom of grace, is in all respects independent of our merit. The Gospel comes to us in our guilt and depravity, and, making no distinction between degrees of vileness, invites all alike to an equal place in the Divine favour. The first summons to the presence of God, where mercy awaits the vilest, is a distinction of which we are reckoned worthy for Christ's sake alone. It is not only a message of pardon ready for our sins, but an undeserved honour put upon our fallen estate. Thus it is grace with a double meaning: grace as the forgiveness of all transgression, and grace as the condescending kindness that calls us before our very repentance has begun.

We are also said to be called unto holiness, and those who are accepted and renewed are termed specifically "the called." But it must never be forgotten that their name and place among the saints really depend upon the gracious imputation of the Divine tolerance. No change of character, no degree of holiness, even though reaching to an entire destruction of sin, avails to modify this essential relation. The saint is always and only reckoned to be holy: not because his holiness is other than real, but because the fact remains that he is and must ever be, with all his sanctity, only a sinner saved by grace. The righteousness conferred

on him as a believer is his own indeed, but it is also of God's free and pure imputation to the end. His personal character is holy, but it needs, if only on account of the past, to be wrapped round by the Divine reckoning as a garment. And hence we are at best only counted worthy of the estate of holiness into which we are called. Justification must to all eternity be "imputed:" forensic, if the term may be allowed; even in the court of heaven.

Lastly, we are called by God to His "kingdom and glory;" and that is the precise vocation referred to in our prayer. But that vocation, viewed as the consummate issue of the Divine purpose concerning us, will be as much the conferring of an undeserved distinction as the first acceptJude 21. ance was. We look "for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." Those who enter into the glory of heaven must pass through an inquisition which will at once attest that they are faultless and prove that they are nevertheless unworthy to enter. It is true that their sanctity will be their garment of righteousness, unspotted from the world; but the judgment of God, which never forgets though it forgives the past, will bear witness that the garment was once stained. Their good deeds will follow them; but so also will their forgiven sins, though in a different sense and for a different reason. If we are saved we shall be saved "according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ." God must confer upon us the final dignity, as He conferred the first, gratuitously and of His mercy, counting us worthy. The whole tenour of Scripture is faithful to this. Our Lord dwelt much upon the good works that will pass the Luke xx. 35. ordeal; but He speaks of those who "shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world," and He bids us pray always Luke xxi. 36. that we may be "accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man."

Hence we see the appropriateness of this term as intro-

ducing the prayer. It gives to God the glory of the full and complete salvation which it supplicates. But having done this it does not end there. It does not intercede as if the election would hereafter be arbitrary and matter only of sovereign disposal; nor does it simply express a good wish that the Thessalonians may prove to have been elected and called. But it asks that they may be among the number of those who, called and sanctified on earth, will be hereafter glorified by the grace that at once counts them and makes them worthy.

The prayer proceeds to teach us what this making worthy means. The connection between the former and the latter part is not expressed; but it is very obvious. St. Paul asks that the Thessalonians may be dignified with the final call, being found worthy of it through the full sanctification of Divine grace. He uses some of the strongest and most expressive terms he ever adopts; and arranges them in a remarkably symmetrical manner, leaving the expositor nothing to do but observe the pairs of counterparts that make up the whole prayer.

Accordingly we must first mark the combination of the imputed and the imparted worthiness. These always go together: what the enemies of the doctrine of justification say, to wit, that God never reckons a man to be what he is not, is perfectly true when rightly understood. In this world the Divine grace mercifully waits while the process is going on; and God may be said to be always making His justified ones worthy of their justification. Nor will He finally accept them, and present them faultless and crown them, until the work of their sanctification is complete: until, that is, all the requirements of His justice and all the good pleasure of His grace are fulfilled in them. The imputation of worthiness is complete at once; the infusion of it is gradual. The reckoning waits a while for the reality, which will surely come; and then will the counting worthy and the making worthy be merged into one.

Hence we must regard the two phrases here employed as embracing further the entire compass of religion. It is the internal and the external perfection of the spiritual life; in both the Divine and the human combine; and the result is perfection whether viewed with reference to the power of God put forth or the accomplishment of the work in us.

It is the whole of religion that is described in the words "all the good pleasure of goodness, and the work of faith with power." We have here one of those many striking summaries in which the Apostle delights to throw out his views of finished godliness; "all that goodness can delight in and desire" refers, of course, to the formation of a perfect character within; whilst the vigorous "work of faith" must include, as the antithesis, all that the external duties of religion involve. It is the fundamental distinction between the inward and the outward, the experience and the action, the character reached and the performance, the virtue attained and the duty done. We find this double aspect recurring continually; but nowhere else have we this precise pair of counterparts:—the perfect realisation of all that the regenerate heart can desire, and the perfect discharge of every obligation that law can impose; or, in other words, the perfection of goodness within and the perfection of fidelity without.

We must, however, mark more specifically the union of the Divine and the human in the perfect holiness prayed for. Not, indeed, as some think, that the Divine part is the pleasure of His goodness and the human part our work of faith, the two combining in the religion which is to be complete and wanting nothing. No such distinction is in the words. They speak of the complacency our own souls feel in goodness as a desire satisfied by God; and our work of faith as fulfilled in Divine power. Both and equally unite the two ever necessary elements, the Divine power and human attainment.

Take the former. The Apostle uses terms which literally make no distinction between the Divine energy in us and our own energy. His phrase is sometimes rendered "the good pleasure of goodness," sometimes "the good pleasure of His goodness." The fact is, that the delight our regenerate souls experience in goodness, in all kinds and degrees of goodness, in goodness carried in every direction to its highest point, is no other than a fruit of the Spirit's renewing grace. It is the desire of God beating in our hearts. It is all that His holiness would see in us put into our own aspiration and purpose. It is, as the Apostle elsewhere says, "the bowels of Christ yearning in us" after perfection. There is literally no distinction possible here. The calm complacency of the soul in all that is true, and honest, and just, and pure, and lovely, and of good report, is the sure token of our regeneration. An unregenerate soul may admire all excellencies, and yet sigh to think of them as an unattainable ideal and a perfection too high for human hope, exhibited only for human despair. But it is only the renewed soul that takes a tranquil and tender delight in the thought of the attainment of these things: having tasted that the Lord is gracious, it feels His commandments also and His promises to be inexpressibly sweet. Those in whom the "mind of Christ" is, long for Christ's goodness; they hunger and thirst after righteousness; their "good pleasure" is in all that is holy; they think upon perfection with a sacred, inextinguishable desire. Abhorring all that is evil, they cleave with the full strength of their souls to all that is good; and thus delighting themselves in God, stirring up in their own souls every aspiration towards holiness, they have their "heart's desire." Ps. xxi. 2.

Take the latter. The work of man's faith is his own work, whether it be the resistance to all evil or the discharge of all duty. But it is a work which God fulfils in us: for He worketh in us of His good pleasure to will and

to do. Here again our prayer fails to make any distinction; and that evidently because no distinction is to be made. God does not "add faith to us," to use the words of the disciples' supplication to their Master; He does not wait for our faith, and then reward and co-operate with its workings; He works within us through our faith. Faith is man's acting in the strength of God; and the power of God in human experience is known only through faith. The Divine blessing does not simply wait upon, assist, and reward our efforts. There is more than that. What we do in faith is the act of God within us. When the dejected disciples addressed the petition we have quoted to our Lord, He gave an ever-memorable reply. He told them that their faith, nourished by devotion, should be a principle of Divine power working within and accomplishing wonders possible only to God. "Ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove;" that is, it shall remove at the bidding of God in you.

Luke xvii. 5.

Matt xvii. 20.

It remains that we dwell upon the perfect attainment of worthiness during the present discipline of the Christian life. It is impossible to put too much strength into the exposition of the words, "fulfil with power," which belong both to the internal and to the external life of grace. The same Divine might is invoked upon the hidden processes of grace and upon the open conduct of Christian obedience. And whether we think of the power of God or the fulfilment in us, there is obviously no limit to the attainment brought within the reach of grace. What is there impracticable to the power of God, either in imparting to us, or performing in us, or accomplishing for us! And that other word "fulfil" is, in its present connection, if possible, still more emphatic. It is a word which is always reserved in the New Testament for very high service; its fulness of meaning embraces all things, while its strength carries all imperfection before it. The prayer is, that God may accomplish in our hearts all that we

desire, all that goodness finds congenial, all that we have set our heart upon. Unless some other word of limitation shall afterwards unsay what the Holy Ghost here says, the believer may dare to hope for the utmost fulfilment of his largest desires. And what can they be but the full and abiding and undisturbed possession of Sovereign Goodness Himself! What but such a state of finished holiness and obedience as God can look down upon with pure complacency, acceptance, and love!

Lastly, the Apostle carries us forward in his prayer to the day when this worthiness shall be acknowledged to be complete, and shall be crowned with glory for ever. "That the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in us, and we in Him:" these words are an echo of those which have just preceded, "when He shall come to be glorified in His saints," and must by them be interpreted.

The finished holiness of the saints, with every desire of their heart fulfilled and every duty of their life discharged, will redound to the glory of the name of Jesus. What they shall be He will have made them: hence the last words of the prayer, "according to the grace of our God and Lord Jesus Christ," as the words were probably written by the Apostle. As the name of the Father is glorified in the Son,—that is, through the revelation of His redeeming Person and work made manifest to the universe in all its glory of wisdom and justice and grace,—so the name of the Son Himself is glorified in His saints, that is, in their full acceptance and sanctification through His atonement. He is already glorified with the glory which He had with the Father before the world was; but He waits yet to receive that other and still richer and more deeply-desired glory that shall redound to Him through the reflection of His own holy likeness from an innumerable company of His redeemed. And when we use this prayer, we ask that we may be among the number of those whose imputed and whose imparted

worthiness shall both and alike reflect honour on the name of Jesus!

But we also are to be "glorified in Him!" The "name" is not now mentioned; because it is only through our most intimate and eternal union with Himself that we attain our supreme glorification of body and soul for ever. Here the prayer of the servant is once more like the prayer of the Master; but supplementing what He left unexpressed.

Jno. xvii. 24. He said, "Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory." St. Paul, not without his Lord's permission, adds, "And be glorified in Me." When we remember all that is meant by being "glorified in Him," we must needs feel persuaded that He whose Name is thus spoken of is God. In God alone is the sphere of the creature's blessedness and glory. Language never goes, never can go, beyond this. Well may we linger upon the last words of our prayer, and muse upon that other rendering of them which an instinct of gratitude accepts, "According to the grace of our God and Lord Jesus."

IV.

EVERLASTING CONSOLATION.

"Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work."— 2 THESS. ii. 16, 17.

THERE are some preliminary points of interest that demand attention here.

This Prayer, like the preceding, passes by a sudden transition from the human duty to the Divine grace: "But may the Lord Himself stablish you in every good work: not in the obedience of these statutes only, but in the whole conduct of life, in every good word and work." It must be observed that man's obligation to establish his own character, and the effectual establishing power of God, are not regarded as co-operating elements. It is not the Apostle's manner thus to speak of them: he makes the confirmation of our holiness either altogether our own work or altogether the work of the Divine Spirit. There are not two factors conspiring to produce one result: it is all our own at the same time that it is all of grace.

Again, once more the Lord Jesus is the Being addressed; but with a peculiar relation to the Father that requires careful consideration. It has been observed before that this is the second of two solitary instances in which the Father and the Son are united with a verb following in the singular. Those who resent both the theology and the grammar of this peculiarity resort to hard expedients. They suppose that the Father, the Source of love and everlasting consolation, is referred to in parenthesis, the Lord Jesus Christ being then the Author of establish-

ing grace. Even in that case the supremacy of Christ as the Hearer of prayer and Giver of grace is maintained; and still the indissoluble union between our Lord and the Father as the one indistinguishable Comforter is such as to satisfy every desire of orthodoxy. Moreover, it is remarkable that the name of Jesus comes first: of this there is no other example; and it must be noted as a striking and memorable fact, especially in the argument with those who think that St. Paul's estimate of his Saviour only by slow degrees reached an exaggerated loyalty, and that it was not until the close of life that he called Jesus his God.

It is a rule almost invariable that the Person addressed in prayer is addressed under an aspect appropriate to the specific supplication. The God of all grace—of every kind of grace—turns a countenance infinitely varied towards His petitioners; and we may always choose among the numberless attributes and descriptions He has assigned to Himself some name that will form a suitable invocation. Here the Apostle is about to ask on behalf of the Thessalonians that they may be consoled, strengthened, and established under the pressure of their enemies in the world and in the Church; and accordingly, with exquisite precision, he calls upon Christ and God as the Everlasting Consoler and Strengthener through grace. Upon Christ and God in the unity of their bestowment: for, as the Apostle includes the Saviour in the act of giving, he must needs include Him also, according to this canon of interpretation, in the possession of the attributes assigned to the Giver. We are reminded of the words of our Highest Authority: "all Mine are Thine and Thine are Mine." It is impossible to distinguish between the Father and the Son in the prerogative of love and everlasting consolation. The "love of God" comes to us only through, and as inseparably connected with, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ;" but in the present unique passage the benedic-

Jno. xvii. 10.

tory distinction is not preserved. We shall not, therefore, allude to it again.

God in Christ is invoked as having loved us, first and more generally; then, more particularly, as having given us through grace everlasting consolation and good hope.

"Who hath loved us." This is the Apostle's first allusion to the supreme and ultimate source of redemption. It is his first clear declaration that in the economy of human salvation love has the preeminence. Already he had said the same thing negatively, when he taught that "God has not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation;" but here he gives the blessed truth its most emphatic and most general positive form. "Which hath loved us," or, rather, "Who by one great, eternal gift proved once for all that He loved us." Whatever other attributes of God are illustrated or vindicated in redemption, all is done, not only in perfect harmony with love, but also under the government and ascendency of love, which is in God as well as in man "the bond of perfectness." In many other phrases will the Apostle afterwards set forth this master-principle, but in all the long list (which however we must forbear to quote) not one with more profound simplicity and pathetic force tells us that our redemption sprang from the love of God, and was its one supreme and eternal manifestation. The only saying that could surpass this was reserved for St. John in his First Epistle, the last document of revelation.

1 Thess. v. 9.

It must be further observed that the link between the love that gave and the gift itself is grace. The love of God must by its very nature impart: all being, and all that belongs to being, is essentially the gift of God. But there is a glorious peculiarity in the gift of grace; and, however plausibly it may be argued that there is something of grace in every Divine gift, it remains true that grace is the medium of the gifts of the love of God as they reach us through redemption. Grace is a word that, so

far as we know, belongs to us as men; and we can now have no conception of a gift of God that comes not through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It is most interesting to watch the history of the word "gift" in the New Testament, and to mark how true its use is to the idea here expressed.

The gift is twofold, "everlasting consolation" and "good hope;" but, before these are separated, they must be regarded in their unity. They comprise the whole sum of our benefit in Jesus Christ; and a more melodious phrase than is used for the purpose is not to be found in the New Testament. The blessing conferred on man through the grace brought by Christ is an "everlasting consolation" as it comes from God, and a "good hope" as we receive it; consolation in its power and possibilities, hope as entertained by our sorrowful hearts; eternal consolation for all the miseries that sin has entailed, and good hope of a glorious compensation in eternity. Or, to sum up all, the former phrase embraces, more negatively, the retrieval of all the consequences of sin in the past; while the latter, more positively, embraces all that man has to expect, when recovered and healed, in the future.

"Everlasting consolation," as a term given to the Gospel, is a phrase nowhere else used. It implies nothing less than the healing of the great wound of sin and the removal of its consequences. From everlasting to everlasting the comfort of redeeming grace reaches to all the sorrows of man. It is an eternal remedy of an eternal disease; an eternal assuagement of a sorrow that would otherwise know no end. Nothing is more certain than that of itself the misery of sin must last for ever: it has in its own nature no resources of cure, no elements of change. As man's sin involved him in guilt, the eternal purpose of God provided an atonement; as it involved him in misery, otherwise unrelieved and abiding, the eternal purpose provided consolation in Christ. He "was manifested" to

1 Jno. iii. 8.

"destroy the works of the devil;" "to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself;" and, with infinite meaning, to comfort the earth, like Noah of old, because of the curse that had fallen upon it. The consolation of this supreme Comforter of man is eternal; unlike the beggarly and fleeting solaces of time—in which it is the joy that endureth but for a night, while the sorrow cometh in the morning—it endures for ever, and survives all the mutations of things. It is an eternal consolation springing from an "eternal redemption."

Heb. ix. 26.

Gen. v. 29.

Heb. ix. 12.

But it must be remembered that this "strong consolation" is treasured up only for those who flee to it for refuge. It is not a relief of the world's estate of misery which is applied with infallible certainty to all mankind. In this sense also "not as the offence" was "the free gift." The offence has brought an inevitable woe upon all: the alleviation and deliverance may be refused and rejected for ever. Hence this adjective of boundless meaning is elsewhere applied by the Apostle to the exact opposite of its application here: "Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction." What in the design of God, and in the experience of multitudes, is an all-sufficient remedy, becomes, through man's refusal to be comforted, a "savour of death unto death."

The "good hope" describes all that part of the everlasting gift which has reference to the future. This expression also is unparalleled in Scripture, though it has certain near approximations. As the Epistle to the Hebrews supplies "eternal redemption" as something like a parallel of "everlasting consolation," so "good hope" finds in that Epistle its representative in the "bringing in of a better hope." As consolation is the relief of misery, so hope introduces a positive good, "the better promises" of the Christian covenant, which, while they silently include, immeasurably surpass, any mere deliverance from evil. The hope itself may be said to be

the whole of the Christian benediction; for, the entire compass of such blessings as are received in the present life constitute only an earnest, and moreover they belong only to a moment. The Christian salvation is essentially a benefit reserved: "we are saved by hope." And all this was in the Apostle's mind in the designation which he here first bestows on Christian hope: no epithet in his vocabulary ever surpasses "good." We look for "good things to come;" and that looking is hope. It is a good hope: good in itself; "better" in relation to the promises given to the fathers; it is really the best inheritance that God has to give, that Christ can merit for us, or that we can receive.

Rom. viii. 24.

Heb. viii. 6.

None of St. Paul's prayers contains so copious a designation of the Hearer of prayer. This suggests the thought that these attributes really contain a tribute of thanksgiving, unavowedly but very emphatically offered. In fact, no supplication ever goes up to God in Scripture without a more or less direct ascription of praise. The very mention of the Divine name is a token of homage; but when the Divine titles to human gratitude are, as here, expressly mentioned, it is that the petitioner may be prepared for his petition by the acknowledgment of the Divine goodness. And now let us pass to the prayer itself, the exposition of which, however, has been more or less anticipated.

Here, as always, we mark the symmetry that reigns more evidently in the prayers than in any other part of St. Paul's writings. At a first glance, and also upon closer investigation, the following seems the sense:— "May the Lord Himself, in the unity of the Father who loved us in Him, and as a gift of grace bestowed on us eternal consolation and good hope, console your inner man by the word that invigorates, and keep your outer life stedfast in every good work and in every good doctrine."

Generally we understand the purport of the prayer

better if we consider the immediate occasion of it. Confidence within and stability without were precisely the graces which the Apostle aimed to strengthen by his words: his exhortation had this for its object, that they should not be "shaken or troubled in mind." In the former Epistle the coming of death was the disturbing thought; in the present Epistle it is the coming of Christ, the Lord of death. In order to administer encouragement, St. Paul is under the necessity of seeming to add to their disquietude. The Epistle is full of gloom. The shadow of a new enemy, the "man of sin," is in it; the frightful developments of evil and the distresses coming on the world are among the most harassing revelations the Apostle could give; and combined were enough to overwhelm the early faith of new converts. Hence the unusual abundance of hortatory language in the two Epistles. But, after all that the stimulating words of their teacher could do, a higher Comforter was necessary. Hence the sudden turn: "May the Lord Himself comfort and stablish your hearts!" 2 Thess. ii. 2.

The comfort here prayed for is not what we call by that name. It is always in Scripture at once exhortation to the soul and invigoration as the result. The heart here is not the seat of feelings and affections: if for no other reason, yet for this, that it is the heart which (according to the true reading) is to be both comforted and confirmed. It is the centre of the man, the man himself. And the inner man is comforted when words are spoken to him by the Spirit which strengthens his own energies. Of the words of the Holy Ghost the Comforter, who is in reality Christ the Comforter, our Lord said, "They are Spirit and they are life." They reveal truths which it fortifies the soul even to hear and know. So close is the Scriptural union of the two ideas that we have by degrees lost the distinction, and the term "comfort" stands for both encouragement in word and invigoration for act. Jno. vi. 63.

It seems obvious thus to introduce the Holy Ghost. But it will not escape notice that it is the Lord and the Father who are,—rather who is,—the Comforter here. All consolation of word and deed is ultimately "from the Father." The Saviour is the Comforter of man, discharging under this title a double function: in heaven, He is our Advocate, and in our own hearts He is our Advocate; but the latter office He gives to His Representative, the Holy Spirit, that other Comforter. Our prayer forgets the distinction, though these Epistles do not forget it. Indeed, this great word must needs bring in the whole fulness of God; each of the Divine persons speaks through Christ to the human heart. Man, like Job, has his Three Comforters around him; but the poor analogy fails when this is said. The Three who comfort our hearts are One: one in nature, one in operation, one in infinite love to our souls.

Jas. i. 17.

1 John ii. 1.

1 Thess. i. 5.

The idea of establishment in the Christian life is as familiar in this Epistle as that of consolation. Here the Apostle introduces, according to the law of symmetry to which reference has been made, the work and the word; or, as we think, the deeds and the doctrines of a true religion.

By keeping the heart strong in His consolation the Lord stablishes the life in His obedience. But the precise burden of the prayer is that God may bless in them, in us, the formation of a character which shall make holy life as it were the operation of an unvarying law. When the word every is added, nothing is wanting to make this another of the Apostle's assertions of a complete Christian perfection. He asks, and bids us ask, for the permanent habit of full obedience. And what can the Lord God require more of His creatures than this? But all is dependent on the establishment of a firm faith in the Christian doctrine. Strange it is that expositors should with almost one consent decline to receive this

interpretation, which indeed the exhortation of verse fifteen forces upon us. There can be no confirmed obedience and holiness without the Christian doctrine. And whatever scruple may arise on this subject is obviated by the reflection that "work" and "word" are here linked into one idea. By no other construction of his phrase could the Apostle have joined them more intimately than by that which lies before us. The life that a Christian should beyond all things desire is a life of entire goodness based upon and growing out of perfect truth.

A touching comment on our prayer is given in the promise which follows after a few sentences. It is as if the Divine Spirit had without delay, "while he was yet speaking," ratified the request: "The Lord is faithful who shall stablish you." 2 Thess. iii. 3.

V.

LOVE AND PATIENCE.

"And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ."—2 THESS. iii. 5.

OUR attention is at once arrested by the threefold order of this prayer. It bears that peculiar triune stamp which we often meet, and which cannot be satisfactorily accounted for save on the theory of a Trinity latent or expressed in all Christian supplication. The only other solution that could be tolerated for a moment would make "the love of God" and "the patience of Christ" technical forms for certain graces into the possession of which the Lord is asked to guide the Christian. This might be admitted were the present passage the only instance; but, as it is one of many, we fall back upon the important canon that the Holy Ghost is always to be regarded as referred to when a third Divine Person joins the Father and the Son, or God and His Christ. Of course it may be said that this is mere assumption; but such an argument we care not to answer. Suffice that for us the administrative Lord is now the Holy Spirit of Christ.

The Prayer itself is one of those clear, terse, classical sentences, which, as we constantly see, exhibit all religion in a symmetrical pair of counterparts. But what the precise relation of these is will better be perceived if we glance at the context, with which this petition is very closely connected. First, we have, in verse 3, a promise of the Lord's fidelity in their preservation; then follows, in verse 4, an expression of the Apostle's "confidence in

the Lord," that the Thessalonians will be faithful to themselves; and then comes the supplication which takes them into a higher and more glorious region than that of mere preservation.

The promise pledges the faithfulness of the Lord,—the Lord Jesus Christ, that is, as emphatically so called in the preceding chapter,—to their confirmation in grace. It is one of those forms of invocation, half promise and half prayer, which abound in St. Paul's writings, of which "the Lord shall deliver me," "The Lord reward him," are obvious instances. The preservation is, on the one hand, a confirmation of the soul itself, and, on the other, the restraint of the evil one. Not the one without the other: the two kinds of guardianship are alike necessary and mutually supplementary. By confirming our inward stability, the Lord often keeps the tempter from us; and, when he comes, the blessing of the Lord on our resistance tends itself to confirm our stedfastness. But the Apostle does not leave all to the Lord's fidelity. He rejoices also in the confidence that the Lord's protected ones will protect themselves, by fortifying their own minds with the truth, and their own lives by obedience (verse 4). Thus has the Apostle, so to speak, balanced the Divine and the human in one protection: "The Lord is faithful if you may be trusted." But, as God must in all things have the preeminence, the prayer follows which gives to God the Spirit the prerogative of directing the soul into the love of God which confirms the spirit, into the patience of Christ which will endure and survive all the enemy's attacks. Stedfastness is essentially connected with constant obedience to the commandment (verse 4), when the love of God shed abroad in the heart is the secret and source of that obedience. Stedfastness is also bound up with perseverance in resistance to the evil one; and that requires the shedding abroad of the patience of Christ within the soul. Thus the connection

2 Tim. iv. 18, 14.

solves a difficulty which many have felt in interpreting these words. The Spirit is asked to guide the soul into the abiding experience of the love of God; and into the full participation of the stedfast endurance of which Christ is at once the source, the example, and the reward.

The love of God is exhibited under two aspects in the New Testament. In the one it is the soul's supreme complacency, affection, and devotion, the whole strength of the mind, and heart, and will, fixed upon God as the supreme object of the outgoing of man's being. But that is not here meant: when the Apostle makes that the object of his prayer he asks it as a benediction of God, and not as a blessing into which the soul is directed. The other view of God's love regards it as the Divine sentiment towards man, the revelation of which, through Christ, to the soul and in the soul, is the strength of all holy consolation and obedience. That love of God beams forth from the face of Christ upon all the world; but those only experience it, rejoice in it, and respond to it, who are brought into a state of mind from which every impediment is removed. It is not the heart as the sphere of the affections that is here meant, but, as before, the whole man: the same inner personality that achieves the obedience, wages the good warfare, and wins the victory. In the strength of the love of God, always poured abundantly upon, and around, and into the soul, there is no duty past performance, and no difficulty that may not be overcome. No higher prayer can be offered to God than this, that by the sweet influence of His Spirit we may be drawn from every lower affection, released from every base impediment, and have our entire being and all that is in it thrown open to the unhindered operation of the love of God.

"The patience of Christ" is a phrase that ought not to seem strange to those who are familiar with St. Paul's habit of uniting the believer with his Lord in all things. He prays literally for the stedfastness of patience that is

Christ's, and for nothing else, in these words. The "patient waiting for Christ" would have required an altogether different word: that one, namely, which is used in the former Epistle. "Patience for the sake of Christ" is equally opposed to the Apostle's phrase. Both these meanings are of course included, and in themselves perfectly appropriate. The Divine Spirit by His grace does direct the souls of believers into a posture of tranquil yet earnest expectation of the coming of Christ; and into the patient endurance of all trials for His sake. But the specific meaning of this prayer,—that which we must first lay hold of, that it may regulate all others,—is that it may please the Lord to remove every hindrance to our perfect union and sympathy with our Lord in His example of endurance unto death. We are called to suffer with Christ if we would reign with Him; to fill up, in our humble measure and degree, His afflictions; and, in the strength of His patient Spirit, to hold out to the end. Our way is "directed" into this patience when we are led into the way of humble, self-renouncing submission: when all things that minister to self-complacency, satisfaction with this life, and earthly-mindedness, are put out of the way when, in short, we are brought into fellowship with the Saviour's mind who "endured the cross" for "the joy that was set before Him." His patience is ended, so far as it is endurance. But we have not yet resisted unto death. And we can offer no more important prayer than this, that we may have our self-will bound, and be girded and led by Another into the way of our Saviour's humiliation and self-sacrifice.

1 Thess. i. 10.

Jno. xxi. 18.

But the full force of the prayer is not felt unless we unite its two branches. Love and patience are here for the first and last time joined; and the reflections suggested by their combination are not easily exhausted.

In our salvation their union has its most impressive exhibition: the mercy of the Father of our spirits reaches

us only through the endurance of the Son; at the cross the love of God and the patience of Christ are blended in the mystery of their redeeming unity; and only that union saved the world. Again the mercy of God waits upon the free will of man with a patience that owes its tender long-suffering to the intercession of Christ; and thus once more the love of God and the patience of Christ combine. So also the Divine economy of grace provides the full power of the love of God for the progressive salvation of the saints, waiting for their full conformity to holy law with a patience that is the most precious fruit of the Redeemer's mediation. God's love wins its final and eternal triumph in our sanctification only because the Intercessor's voice is continually heard: "Have patience with them, and they shall pay Thee all." Eternal glory will be the last demonstration of the love of God and the crowning victory of the patience of Christ.

We must, however, regard this combination as the object of our prayer. To the Apostle's mind all that the Christian needs for the struggle and victory of life is the abundant effusion of the love of God into the heart as an active principle, and the perfect defence of the heart by the patience of Christ as a passive grace. But the form of his prayer shows that he did not separate the two as much as we do. All duty and all resistance find their strength in the love of God; all duty and all resistance must be perfected in the patience of Christ. The true Christian is all love in his work; he is all patience in his hope. The hope of Christ's return gladdens the soul continually: it kindles love to deeper fervour, and gives patience and strength to endure. In due time—that is, when all prayers that are born of time shall cease—the patience of Christ shall be lost in the "partaking of Christ;" and the great surviving grace, the love of God in us, will abide for ever.

Heb. iii. 14.

VI.

PEACE FROM THE LORD OF PEACE.

"Now the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all."—2 THESS. iii. 16.

THE term "Peace" is usually reserved by the Apostle for his invocations and greetings. On a first glance, this passage might seem to be no exception. The Epistle is about to end a troubled and yet reassuring strain; and, after an earnest exhortation to the spirit of quietness and contented industry, the final salutations of peace might appear to be an appropriate close. But we see as we read on that the Apostle has in store another farewell salutation, and ends with his own chosen token of "Grace." The present greeting is translated while taking form into an impressive petition, which stands alone amongst the prayers, not only as to its object, the Peace of the Gospel, but also in respect to every turn of its phraseology.

That it is Jesus who is meant by "the Lord of Peace," will be obvious if we remember how constantly each of the terms of this appellation is given to Him. St. Paul habitually calls Him Lord, especially in this Epistle; and His name is brought into special relation with "peace" throughout his writings. Hence, combining the terms, He is the Lord of Peace: He procured it by His sacrifice, He preaches it by His Gospel, and in His spiritual kingdom He administers its blessings for ever.

Although this title is nowhere else literally given to our Saviour, it is only an apt compendium of His other titles, and gives in one perfect phrase the whole sum of His mediatorial work.

Taking it in its widest sense it expresses the general characteristic and design of His appearance upon earth. The appellation is only another form of the ancient title by which His coming was foreannounced from the beginning. How He should restore harmony on earth was not known, at least it was not revealed; but it was declared that He should vanquish the power of Satan, turn away from man the displeasure of God, and establish a government of peace. In the great Old-Testament prediction of His coming, Isaiah makes all His glorious names merge into one, "The Prince of Peace;" His mediatorial obedience is described by one phrase, the bearing "the chastisement of our peace;" and His kingdom is a government, "the increase of" which would be "peace," the "abundance of peace." In all these prophetical utterances, which are central and leading texts, it is obvious that it is not the idea of tranquil prosperity alone that is meant, but that peculiar peace of the Gospel which required a mysterious reconciliation of God and man. Let us follow out the programme of the three texts of the Prophet who thus interprets the Apostle by anticipation.

Isa. ix. 6.
Isa. liii. 5.
Isa. ix 7.
Ps. lxxii. 7.

When our Lord came, the very manner of His coming was a token of peace. His appearance was the manifestation of God among men in the most close and friendly relation: in a relation so intimate as to surpass all human conception. He was "God with us;" and that name was the unsearchable secret of the angels' song, "Peace on earth." They did not simply utter a prophecy of an issue of peace that the world should hereafter witness; they declared that the world's Peace was born among men, and that the alliance of God with our nature in the Person of Christ was the Reconciliation which had been preached as to come and was now at length brought nigh. The incarnation could have no meaning but this. A visitation of judgment would have required only that the Son of God should appear as a Theophany or manifestation, not that

He should take our very nature into His being and personality. His becoming man was as such an eternal ratification of peace between heaven and earth: the mystery of grace of which the Lord Himself gave us a token and seal in the birth of Immanuel. This was indeed "an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off." Isa. vii. 14. lv. 13.

But He who brought the sign was Himself cut off in order that it might be everlasting. Though the reconciliation was virtually effected from the beginning,—for the Lamb was "slain from the foundation of the world," and the Peace of the Gospel followed the steps of the first transgressors, when they left Paradise,—yet it required the atonement of "the blood of the cross." That sacrifice of our Representative was absolutely necessary; the warfare of Divine justice against our sins must needs spend its severity upon Him. The peace was not indeed doubtful before He died: it had been proclaimed through all ages, and was for ever "settled in heaven," before Satan's shadow fell on the earth; but this unlimited assurance rested upon the supreme counsel of the Holy Trinity, which made the Son's sacrifice and the Father's acceptance of it an eternal necessity. "In the body of His flesh," that is, in His incarnation, the Redeemer declared the acceptance of the race of mankind; but it was only "in the body of His flesh through death" that in very deed the "enemies" are "reconciled." Col. i. 20. Col. i. 21 22.

The title we now consider, however, is a glorious one. The "Lord of Peace" does not direct our thought so much to the abasement of Him who by His self-sacrifice propitiated the Divine offence at sin, as to the exaltation of the Redeemer who has obtained for man the reconciliation. Our Melchizedek became the King of Salem, that is, the King or Lord of peace, by virtue of the sacrifice which He first offered as the Priest of the Most High God. But the Royal title tells us that He has achieved our peace gloriously, abundantly, and with the power of an endless

life. Yet, rather, like His ancient type, He was never other than a King: at the lowest point of His abasement under the shame of our sin, and of His agony in the endurance of its curse, He was "the Lord." Well, therefore, and by every title, may He be called "The Lord of Peace."

Whilst this is true, it must not be forgotten that the term "Lord" is for the most part applied to Christ in respect to the jurisdiction He obtained in death. "To this end Christ both died and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living." When He rose from the dead, "all power in heaven and in earth" was given unto Him: all things pertaining to man's salvation passed immediately into His hands. As St. Peter said, in his first unstraitened sermon to the Gentiles, "He is Lord of all." Everything became Dominical from that time: the "Lord's" house, the "Lord's" supper, the "Lord's" day, mark the great change. And thus "the peace" became also His, to be administered by Him, on conditions of His appointment.

Rom. xiv. 9.

Matt. xxviii. 18.

Acts x. 36.

Christ is Himself the Publisher of His own peace. "The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: He is Lord of all," is now "the word of reconciliation," preached in His name by the ambassadors of Christ. The terms on which the sinner may make his peace with God are prescribed by the Lord Himself; nor does He permit any human authority to interfere with them. They are very simple; but they are also very rigorous, as against both those who add to them and those who take from them. He requires a true and deep repentance, and a real and stedfast warfare against all sin: no peace that is pronounced upon those who are careless of this condition was ever ratified by Him. But when this condition is complied with He demands only a supreme reliance on Himself; and those who encumber the sinner's approach by any human devices and inventions have no sanction from Him: they

Acts x. 36.

2 Cor. v. 19.

must answer to the "Lord of the peace" for their affliction of the souls of those whom He calls to find rest in Himself.

This leads, however, to another most important truth which this prayer teaches us. Our Saviour Himself administers His own government by His Spirit, and imparts with His own hand the blessings of His peace. As He presents His atonement to the Father in heaven, so He imparts it to us upon earth. By Him, St. Paul elsewhere says, "we receive the atonement:" which is, being interpreted, we receive from Christ that peace within which answers to the reconciliation or atonement without. He dispenses the forgiveness of sins, and gives the assurance of it, by His Spirit: permitting none to interpose between Himself and the penitent save as the simple ambassadors of His will. Of this He gave clear tokens during His presence with us. Sending His Apostles forth, He commanded them to preach that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand," and to utter the salutation of peace on every house; but the assurance of the remission of sins He reserved for His own lips. They might perform all wonders of mercy in His name; but not pronounce forgiveness. The greeting of peace they might offer, but not speak the peace of pardon. But in proportion to the restraint upon them was the freedom with which He Himself dispensed it to the penitent. "Go in peace," "Go unto peace," are words with which the Gospels make us very familiar; but we have only a few instances recorded out of multitudes. And still "the Lord of peace" speaks the word that tranquillises the conscience and gives the heart rest. The prayer lays much emphasis upon "Himself:" we are instructed to pray directly to Him in whom are hid all the treasures of forgiveness and peace, as well as of wisdom and knowledge, and to expect that He will speak to us by His Spirit—whose voice is as clear to the spiritual ear as was the Lord's own to the outward ear of Jewish penitents

Rom. v. 11.

Matt. iii. 2.

—the assurance of our acceptance with God. Indeed, the Apostle suggests a change here to our advantage. The Lord was wont to say, "Go unto peace;" but now He gives an abiding peace: "The Lord be with you all."

There is another very striking word in this petition. "The Lord of peace give you peace always." This unusual expression must have its full force. It means at the outset that the humble petitioner may expect a permanent, unvarying, uninterrupted assurance of His acceptance: the prayer for forgiveness that ascends "without ceasing" is without ceasing heard and answered "always." And, if this is not pressing the word too far, what an unspeakable privilege it assures! But this is not all. The peace of Christ, like the peace of God, is larger and deeper than reconciliation: it includes all that is included in perfect spiritual prosperity, and therefore compasses the soul around with goodness and "passeth understanding." It was in this deep and full meaning that the Saviour Himself used the term, when He at once bequeathed it as His only legacy, and promised it as His only gift. "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you." Two blessings He preeminently made His own; and sealed them as His own to His people for ever: His "peace," as including all the profound, unsearchable, blessedness of fellowship with Himself; and His "joy," as including all the outward manifestations of that blessedness for ever. "My peace" has, of course, two interpretations: it is either the spiritual prosperity which the Saviour imparts, and of which the world knows nothing; or it is the unspeakable and boundless peace of the Lord's own hidden spirit. We humbly limit ourselves to the former in our prayer; but who shall forbid the earnest petitioner to glide into the latter meaning? What is there in the Lord's peace, or in the joy of our Lord, into which the believer may not enter?

John xiv. 27.

John xv. 11.

"By all means:" this also is a peculiar phrase; so unusual,

that we may be sure it was intended to carry a very special meaning. There are, indeed, evidences among the various readings that the word has offended the critics and transcribers: but it remains firm, and teaches us that we must not only expect the Lord's peace always, but that we must expect it to come to us through strange and seemingly discordant methods. He who is the "Lord of peace" shows His supremacy in this, that He can make all things contribute to His servants' prosperity, and extract their well-being out of elements that seem utterly at variance with it. We pray not merely that the Redeemer may shed through His word, and His sacred ordinances, the sweet influences of His peace. For this we scarcely need to pray. But we ask that He may impart it in tribulation, and make tribulation minister to the profound communion of the soul with God; that He may preserve to the spirit interior peace, whilst the surface, and sometimes more than the surface, is harassed by temptation; that the very turbulence of the world may be made not only to heighten our peace by contrast, but to confirm it by driving us to more intimate fellowship with Him whose "good cheer" is the supreme and all-sufficient pledge of victory. This bold petition demands that the rage of Satan and the wrath of man should not only praise God, but be turned to His servant's deeper joy. If we connect it for a moment with the preceding verses, it teaches the Thessalonians to expect that the unrest and disorder of evil men should work out for the devout who were exercised thereby a far more exceeding peace. The voice of the Lord may not always hush the storm around or within the soul; but always and by all means He will give His peace in that inner man which disquietude ought never to reach.

Jno. xvi. 33.

Whatever wonders of grace are involved in all this receive their solution in the final words, "The Lord be with you all!" Let it be once more observed that this is

not the farewell greeting, which might be explained, or explained away, as a mere good wish. It is emphatically a part of the prayer, and indicates that the special presence of the Lord is a blessing which must be asked, and which is the secret of all peace and happiness. It is true that He promised His presence with His disciples to the end of the world. But not the less on that account is the internal inhabitation of the heart by Christ an object of earnest prayer and the exceeding great reward of faith. And it is His presence which brings with it all spiritual good. Where He dwells there must be peace. No heart can be so cheerless but that His sudden entrance and benediction shall infuse into it life and energy. He commanded His disciples to pronounce their peace in every house they entered. Much more does He observe His own law. Entering our hearts, He speaks His "peace;" abiding in us, He gives us peace "always;" and by the secret energy of His grace He turns all events to our good, giving us peace "by all means."

VII.

RESTORATION TO CORPORATE PERFECTNESS.

"Now I pray to God that ye do no evil; not that we should appear approved, but that ye should do that which is honest: . . . . and this also we wish, even your perfection."—2 Cor. xiii. 7—9.

The Epistles to the Corinthians have given us some important illustrations of the Apostle's devotional gratitude, as exhibited in elaborate thanksgivings and in brief ejaculatory expressions. But they furnish no prayers, properly so called, until the passage now lying before us; in which the writer closes a long series of the most earnest exhortations and warnings that he ever had occasion to utter, by the vehement outpouring of his desire for the perfection of the church at Corinth. We shall better understand the purport of the petition if we consider for a moment the circumstances that gave rise to it, and mark the peculiarity of the language it employs.

This short and abrupt "wish" is inlaid into a very difficult context; the difficulty of which, however, all but vanishes when we obtain a clear view of the Apostle's relations to the Corinthian Christians, and enter into the deep trouble that engrossed his heart. No city was more dear to him than Corinth. He had spent a longer time there than in any other European centre. But, after devoting to them so much of his oral labours, it had been his disappointment to find that, to a great extent, those labours had been in vain. He had written one long letter of rebuke—probably following another that has not come down to us — which contained the most careful and thorough exposure of the doctrinal, moral, and eccle-

siastical evils that had crept in among them. The result of this pastoral he had waited for with intense anxiety; but that result, when it came, had given him only a partial satisfaction. Some of their backslidings had been healed; but the roots of their declension remained. The present Epistle most frankly acknowledges the good in their repentance; but it scarcely disguises, or attempts to disguise, the Apostle's resentment of that unholy tolerance which permitted the continuance among them of principles subversive of Divine and apostolical authority. He cannot suppress his conviction that the Corinthian church was, to a great extent, disorganised. Influences were at work fatal to its unity, and completeness, and integrity in faith and order. Now St. Paul knew full well that his own apostolical authority was, under Christ, the bond of their perfectness both in doctrine and discipline. Accordingly he dwells much upon the "proof" of that authority which his coming among them would exhibit. Whether they had suggested this word, or the Apostle only attributed it to them,—"Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me" (verse 3),—it certainly had seized his mind, and he dwells upon the idea, after his manner, with all kinds of variations. This one word "proof" is the key to the whole passage, and solves every difficulty. As to the approval of his authority in Christ, there was this alternative: either he would prove it by rectifying their disorders magisterially, and so restoring them to soundness; or they testing themselves, putting away their evil, doing what was honest, and thus "restoring themselves to perfectness," would prove the virtue of his apostolical counsel and leave "unapproved," that is, unevidenced in act, the prerogative of apostolical discipline. And here comes out, in all its strength and tenderness, St. Paul's unselfish love. Unlike Jonah, he would be rejoiced that his threatenings went for nothing, provided only the amendment of the Corinthians was the reason. And in the hope of this he utters the double wish,

which is, however, the language of ardent prayer, that they might be restored to "perfection," as the result of abstaining from every evil, and of performing all that was good.

It will be obvious, therefore, that the "perfection" of this prayer includes, on the one hand, perfect restoration to ecclesiastical order, and, on the other, perfect recovery of moral purity: the corporate or Church idea predominating in the word, as its etymology in the Greek indicates. It will be obvious, further, that the evils for their deliverance from which the Apostle prays, and the corporate perfection which is the ideal of his desire, must be illustrated by reference to the general strain of the two Epistles.

First, the prayer is for the perfect recovery which would result from "not doing the evil," or, what is the same thing, the putting away of the evil by "doing what is excellent" (verse 7). The vices that infested the Corinthian church exhibit to us as in epitome the vices that have been the bane of the Church of Christ generally from the beginning. The New Testament has given us a clear description of those errors, as also of similar deviations from the standard of corporate perfectness among the churches of Asia Minor. And the reason of this faithful delineation, so humbling to the apostolic churches, will be evident to every reader. The communities of Corinth, of Galatia, and of Asia Minor are specifically set forth as warning examples.

The fundamental disorder that needed to be repaired was that of rebellion against the supreme authority of the Divine Revealer, and the Divine Inspirer of Truth, in the person of the Apostles, their representatives in the Church. Whether as Judaizers or as Rationalists, the opponents of St. Paul evidently abounded in Corinth. If not producing such absolutely revolutionary effects as in Galatia, the Corinthian Judaizers were by no means uninfluential; but

the false Gnosis of those who measured faith by reason was still more predominant. The openings of the two Epistles are devoted to these two parties respectively. But throughout both it requires no very minute observation to note that the Apostle is strenuously bent on checking the tendency of some among the Corinthians to think for themselves in the light of their own reason, and to criticise the unassailable words of revelation. His aim is
2 Cor. x. 5. to "bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." "The knowledge of the glory of God" had shone into his heart and the hearts of his fellow-Apostles from
2 Cor. iv. 3, 6, 7. "the face of Jesus Christ," and if it was "hid," it was "hid to them that are lost." The treasure was despised by many of the "wise in this world," because it was in "earthen vessels." But—and here we must turn from the Second Epistle to the First—"the things of the Spirit
1 Cor. ii. 14. of God" are "foolishness" to the "natural man, . . . because they are spiritually discerned." The Apostle then declares, as his final appeal, in the hearing not only of the Corinthians, but of Christendom to the end of the world,
1 Cor. ii. 16. "We have the mind of Christ." Rationalism, the bane of the modern Church, has here its best description and its only cure. The Scriptures of inspiration contain the mind of Christ; they require a spiritual discernment, and cannot be judged by the unregenerate reason. Rebellion against this truth is virtually a rejection of the Bible, and therefore of Christianity. As a principle in the individual, this is fatal to religious stability and growth. As a principle in the Church, it is the root of all disorganisation; and it must be put away, with all its forms of manifestation, before the community bearing the name of Christ can put on its "perfection." With regard to the Church at large—not now to make special application—there is no prayer in the Apostle's entire Liturgy that should be more fervently offered: "And this we pray, even your restoration." Answered it certainly will be; for the unity and victory of

the Faith are sure. But the answer is long delayed. With regard to the universal Church, it seems more distant than ever; and this should make those communities which are faithful to "the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets" more earnest to maintain their integrity. Eph. ii. 20.

Another element of disorder for the removal of which from the Corinthians the Apostle prayed, was the direct result of the former,—a lax maintenance of some of the vital doctrines of the Christian confession. It is impossible for us now to determine what errors were taught at Corinth, or upon which of the fundamental truths of the Gospel the spirit of Rationalism fastened. Our documents are never exhaustive on these subjects. St. Paul generally singles out the points in which obliquity was most manifest, such as the Coming of Christ, when writing to the Thessalonians; the one atoning foundation, when writing to the Galatians;—and as to all others he says, "The rest will I set in order when I come." The heretics in Corinth assailed the resurrection generally, and this as including Christ's resurrection in particular: hence their doctrinal errors were perilously near to an entire abandonment of the atoning death of the Redeemer; and it was not to be wondered at that they misapprehended the design of the sacramental memorial of that death. Many hints there are, which cannot be referred to here, of the spreading influence of heretical opinion among them. And it was not without reference to the corruptions of doctrine that the dejected Apostle expressed his fear that "he should not find them such as he would." His jealousy of the preacher of another Jesus, who might have corrupted their simplicity as the serpent beguiled Eve, had assumed just before a very marked expression. To save them from listening to such miserable rivals, he condescended to speak boastfully—his "folly" for their sake—of his own superior credentials. His vehement desire to preserve the Corinthian church "a chaste virgin to Christ," undefiled by 1 Cor. xi. 34. 2 Cor. xii. 20. 2 Cor. xi. 1. 2 Cor. xi. 2—4.

doctrinal error, as he himself explains his meaning, gives a peculiar tremulousness and tumult to his diction which has no parallel save in the Epistle to the Galatians. And there cannot be a doubt that the integrity of their faith was in his thought when he declared with so much emphasis that he could do "nothing against the truth, but for the truth," and earnestly besought of God that they might be "perfect and entire, wanting nothing." In this sense, also, the praying people of Christ have much need day and night to urge the Apostle's cry.

Neglect and irreverence in the Divine service invariably follow hard upon laxity in doctrine. Of this the Corinthian church furnished a striking example: the sin and the punishment are both most vividly set before us, with somewhat of the same awful solemnity with which the crime and the doom of Ananias and Sapphira, individual mockers of God, are described in the Acts. The disorganisation in worship which the First Epistle condemns must have gone to an extreme almost inconceivable by us: that the Supper of the Lord, the central act of worship, should have been so desecrated as to call down upon the church such visitations of sickness and death, implies a spirit of license and insensibility to Divine things that doubtless infected all parts of the service of the church. The Second Epistle makes no reference to a continuance of this disorder; we may therefore suppose that the Apostle's stern rebuke attained its object. But that Epistle plainly enough indicates that the same leaven was at work in other directions; and the final prayer included the removal of that spirit of disorder and the observance of all that was "decent" (verse 7), in its wish for their restoration to perfectness.

The Corinthian church is in this, as in other respects, set forth as an example to all churches and to us. It is true that the peculiar punishment which vindicated the sanctity of the communion of Christ's most holy fellowship

with His people has not been continued nor even repeated in any known later instances. But the Divine displeasure on this kind of desecration is not the less severe on that account. Hypocrisy, and lying, and tempting of the Holy Spirit are not less flagrant sins because they are not now visited with the penalty that lighted on Ananias and Sapphira. In all these cases the chastisement was signal in early times that men might never deem the Divine justice lowered by the Gospel; it was not repeated, for that would have been inconsistent with the ordinary law of Gospel probation. Never was the Apostle's prayer for reformation more needful than now. Two kinds of dishonour are in our own day done to the Divine service: the one taking away its simplicity, and discerning more in the ordinances than they have to show; the other robbing everything external and symbolical of its true value, and reducing religious ceremonial to the level of mere human arrangement. Both are equally distant from ecclesiastical perfection; both are equally violations of the Divine order in the ordinances of religion. In our own times, and in our own land of England, and in our own neighbourhood, wherever we may dwell, are to be found representatives of both. The Ritualists, as they are conventionally called, discern the Lord's body in their central service in a sense in which others discern it not. They "see," as really present, what the Scripture only bids us rightly to "discern" and "estimate." There is much reason to think that by a superstitious ceremonial, based upon a great delusion, they dishonour what they desire to reverence; whilst from all wilful contempt of the holy communion of believers they may be safe. The same may be said of many communities which systematically neglect the Supper of the Lord, and are indifferent to all the outward decencies of worship. They neither see nor discern the Lord's body; which, whether as meaning His sacrifice or His spiritual food, they dishonour in its memo-

rials. Meanwhile they also do not intend the dishonour which they inflict on the house and name of God. From the equal sins of excess and defect may we and ours be saved!

Closely connected with the preceding elements of disorder and imperfection is the spirit of faction which the Apostle vehemently condemns throughout both Epistles. This evil seems to have been rebuked by the First Epistle in vain; for, just as he is about to close the Second, St. Paul intimates that he anticipated on his third coming a recurrence of the distress which he felt when the Corinthian parties—the originals of all subsequent sects—shocked him by the use of his own name, in common with the names of Peter and Apollos and of Christ Himself, as the watchword of separation. Amongst the vehement outbursts of his resentment which we read and wonder at, none contains a more condensed fervour of protest than "Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you?"—words which no exigency short of the most imperative could ever have extorted from St. Paul, even in the apostrophe of argument. It might seem as if the holy Apostle had a presentiment, if not a foresight, of the calamities that should befall the Church through this spirit of division. Just as at a later time he hurled rather than wrote his protest against the Antinomian and Gnostic heretics who were beginning to vitiate the doctrine of Christ, so now he sets no limit to his righteous indignation against the disturbers of the unity of the Church. The first paragraphs of the First Epistle and the last paragraphs in the Second unite in this. The strong references to his severity as the minister of the Saviour's wrath, which so affectingly alternate in this chapter with his tenderness, are all to be explained by his resentment of this deadly sin. And it was with a distinct apprehension of its exceeding sinfulness that he expressed his hope that they would cease to do this evil, and breathed forth his wishes for their "perfect restoration to order."

The last element of disorder referred to by the Apostle was the violation of Christian morality of which the church was guilty: disorder which in some respects was manifest and glaring, whilst in others it was secret and connived at. None of the churches whose burden lay on the Apostle provoked so deeply his displeasure; none so humbled and grieved him. In proportion to the abundance of their spiritual gifts was their carelessness in the discharge of spiritual obligations. St. Paul's most generous praise in some passages has tended to hide this fact; but the evidence of it appears in almost every paragraph. Especially we have it in the context of our prayer. In chap. xii. there is obvious reference to those two classes of moral offence from which in chap. vii. 1 the Corinthians had been exhorted to cleanse themselves.

The sins of the spirit are summed up here in one of those catalogues for which St. Paul's Epistles are remarkable. The list is perhaps more complete than anywhere else: and here alone is it written down as marking the conduct of professing Christians. It is true that St. Paul only expresses his fear that he should not "find them as he would;" but we know how to interpret these words of his Christian courtesy and charity and good hope. His fear was no other than his confident and sad expectation. The extent to which these ebullitions of pride, wrath, jealousy, malignity, and strife pervaded the Corinthian church we know not. But the Apostle does not qualify his words, nor restrict their application, as he certainly would have done if these vices had been limited to a refractory and undisciplined few. The same can hardly be said of the sins of the flesh that follow. St. Paul passes by a remarkable transition to another tone. With deep pathos he intimates his dread that his God will "humble" him and make him "mourn" in the presence of the many who had not repented of their notorious and unbridled sensuality. Let the term "many" be duly weighed, and

still more the "not repenting:" the result will be a conviction that many of the Corinthians were no less infamous in their secret sensuality than in their open turbulence. In fact, there is no resisting the evidence that this most liberally endowed of all the churches, which had enjoyed the Apostle's long residence, had heard the highest Christian eloquence of Apollos, and had received more epistolary communications than any other, surpassed all churches in practical ungodliness. And this condition of relaxed morality was only the result, the natural and necessary result, of those other elements of disorder to which allusion has been made. The true and only means of recovery were neutralised by infidelity and the haughty spirit of Rationalism: hence the old Corinth reasserted itself and obtained ascendency over the new.

Putting these things together, we shall have a very complete view of those elements of disorder and imperfection the removal of which the Apostle earnestly desired. Now let us take his word "perfection" in its positive meaning, and consider what his aspiration was for the Corinthian and every Christian church. It must be remembered that St. Paul's prayers always rise above their immediate occasion, and embrace the widest range of objects and the most abundant fulfilment that it could enter the heart to desire. It would be wrong, therefore, to limit his good wish here to the removal of the "evil" that he deprecated as marring the Corinthians' perfection. He longed and prayed for their attainment of all the completeness that may belong to a Christian church. Let us once more endeavour to interpret the Apostle's word by a glance at the tenor of the Epistles: this time, however, seeking the elements of a positive perfectness, and no longer thinking of the correction of abuses.

But before doing so, we cannot but dwell for a moment upon the wonderful fact that such a church, outwardly encompassed and inwardly harassed by such corruptions, should be prayed for as capable of perfect amendment;

that the possibility should be assumed of a restoration to soundness, not at some distant time, but as it were immediately, and as the result of energetic cooperation with Divine grace. What was the secret of this transition from deep distrust and the extreme of moral disapproval to the strong expression of prayerful hope and exhortation? Was it St. Paul's confidence in the power of his own words? No; for he had written two letters comparatively in vain. Was it his vague and unfounded reliance upon the victory of Christian principle generally, or a sanguine trust in these Corinthians in particular? No; for he also in his degree "knew what was in man." But it was his firm assurance that, through the blessing of God on his personal efforts, the church would be roused to redeem itself from its bondage, and protest against and cast out its offenders, and vindicate its purity. He knew that the enemies of order and purity were only a minority; and it may be that at this season of great anxiety—of unsurpassed anxiety, evidence of which is found in every paragraph of this Epistle—his Master gave him a secret assurance of his success. Certain it is that for a season the Corinthian church enjoyed great prosperity. And this is an abundant encouragement to us in our day. There need be no more than a step between great disorder and a sound amendment.

The bond of ecclesiastical perfectness is evidently throughout these Epistles, and in all St. Paul's writings, a compact organisation vivified and kept in living unity by the Holy Spirit. It was this for which he prayed; and that he prayed for it proves that every Christian community should keep such a standard of aspiration in view. It is true that the Apostle's highest ideal points rather to the spiritual than to the visible community; the growth into the fulness of the stature of the perfect man in Christ Jesus belongs rather to the mystical body of which the Lord is the Head than to any one embodiment

of corporate Christianity on earth. But the visible Church also has its perfection of organised unity; and it was that which the writer evidently had in his mind. Although the English word "perfection" gives no hint of this, the Greek term so translated carries that meaning. It expresses the Apostle's ardent wish that the Corinthian community might be "perfectly joined together" under one regimen and discipline: all factions suppressed, all divisions abolished, and all the separate congregations of the city united under their pastors and teachers in one corporate body for common worship, communion, and religious labour. And it expresses the Holy Spirit's will concerning us in our day that division and discord should cease; that, although separations in modern times are tolerated which the New Testament did not anticipate, every individual community should maintain its own unity, subordination and tranquil internal government, under its own rulers and guides, while ready to communicate in all good things with every other evangelical church upon earth. Lawlessness within a church itself, and bitterness towards other churches, are both and alike inconsistent with its corporate perfection.

The Church's order of worship may even on earth attain a certain standard of perfection; and this must be included in the present prayer. To all hearts rightly touched, there is something unspeakably attractive in the idea of a perfect Christian service in the Lord's house. There are many who think this unattainable, or, if attainable, of slight importance: either they hold an exaggerated notion of the comparative value of a strictly personal religion, or they regard public devotion as the mere vehicle for religious instruction, or they undervalue common worship because it is made too common. But those who enter deeply into the spirit of the New Testament delight in the house of the Lord and its services as much as the Psalmist did in the days of elaborate ritual.

We can hardly gather St. Paul's ideal of a perfect Christian worship from these Epistles in particular; scarcely perhaps from all his Epistles united. The circumstances of the early Church were peculiar; and it is scarcely too much to say that the normal and permanent worship of the Christian house of prayer was scarcely known among the Corinthians. With them, as with most of the early churches, the Lord's Supper was more central and exclusive than it was intended to be and afterwards became; it was also surrounded with some very doubtful appendages, afterwards disused. So, also, the extraordinary endowments of many members of the community introduced an element unfamiliar in the permanent service. Hence, we must not look to these Epistles for a model of that perfection the principles of which, however, are very plainly set forth in them as throughout the New Testament.

It is not too much to say that in these days the minds of devout men are everywhere bent upon discovering and acting out those principles. The perfection of the sweet service of song and prayer and meditation and word and sacrament is aimed at in very different ways and with very different results. Happy the Christian congregations which seek to attain in the Spirit's own method the ideal which the Spirit proposes: avoiding the two extremes, of a ceremonial that stifles the simplicity of devotion, and of a bareness and poverty which dishonour the Holy Name of Him who is in the midst. That there is such a perfection of praise and prayer attainable as shall make the place where the disciples meet the antechamber of heaven, and the Christian communion the earnest of an eternal fellowship, let us never doubt.

Once more, the Apostle's ideal of corporate perfection included a noble theory of mutual help in the Christian fellowship. These Corinthian Epistles are a complete depository of the social principles of Christianity, and of the preceptive details of its system of mutual edification.

The spirit of uncharitableness, selfishness, and faction which reigned among them having been sternly rebuked, the Apostle proceeds to dilate upon the perfect opposite in the Christian ideal; and thus the beautiful exhibition of charity in the twelfth chapter in the former Epistle counterbalances the miserable exhibition of faction in the First. The theory which he lays down cannot now be examined. It is very high, but not beyond attainment. Suffice to say that it proclaims this principle: that every member of the body must in his vocation and stewardship render back to Christianity all that in Christianity he receives, and give to the community the fullest advantage of whatever talent he as an individual may possess. Of course, if the corporate perfectness of a Church waits for the universal operation of these principles, it will wait for ever, and in vain. Such perfection is not attainable by the community on earth. But the nearer the approach to this, the nearer is the Church to the realisation of its earthly calling. It may be said that the Saviour's design is accomplished most fully where charity has the disposal of the Church's wealth; where employment is given in various ways to the diversified talents of its members in preaching and in teaching; where mutual exhortation and encouragement are secured by periodical meetings; where, in short, every joint, according to its defined function in the common organisation, supplieth the measure of its effectual working to the edifying of the body in love. No apostolical test of perfectness in the Church as a community is more easily applied, or more generally forgotten, than this.

Still remaining within the limits of an individual community, we may regard the Apostle's ideal as embracing also a high standard of Christian morality. In other words, the purity of the Church must be guarded by a rigid discipline. But that discipline is of two kinds. It is certainly ecclesiastical, according to the ordinary meaning of the word: where that is relaxed, the Church is

already on the way to dissolution, or to a corrupt continuance which is worse than dissolution. Whatever other attributes and prerogatives it may have, the Church that does not prosecute even to the death every capital offence against its purity is very far from its perfection. But the more effectual discipline is the maintenance of a high standard of morality in the common sentiment of the people through the sedulous instruction of the Christian ministry. A perfectly healthy Church, or a Church on the way to perfection, is always accepted of God and approved of all men who aim at perfect sanctity of morals. The interior operation of grace in transforming the characters of its members into the likeness of Christ is altogether another matter: that is a perfection which belongs rather to the mystical community, and is seen by God alone. But the practical observance of the Divine commandments in general, and of the Saviour's interpretations of them in particular, is what may be read of all men, and what all men demand of the professing Church. It is not, however, because the world expects it, or because consistency demands it, that the "approved" Church aims at a lofty standard of morals. It is because Jesus Christ is in it (verse 5), and prompts by His Spirit to every good word and work. Where vice reigns, or even moral laxity, there, it may be confidently said, the Church is in the way to declare itself "reprobate" or unapproved. Its perfection, however, as prayed for by St. Paul, is its aim at a perfect holiness.

Lastly, we should not be faithful expositors of our Apostle's meaning if we did not make the end of perfection the strong spirit of charity in the Christian community: charity, that is, in its distinct character, as going beyond the limits presided over by brotherly love. Charity is a word of many meanings. It covers a multitude of graces in itself, as well as a multitude of sins in others. It has an unlimited range within the daily

life of the believer, and within the sphere of the local community. But its highest meaning and its noblest sphere is the Catholic Church and the outer world. And of this kind of charity, as essential to the perfection of a Christian society, these two Corinthian Epistles beyond any other bear witness. Nothing is more characteristic of the Apostle, whether of his noble spirit or of his peculiar mental habits, than the extraordinary anxiety displayed throughout this letter for the due and cheerful exercise of the Corinthians' benevolence towards the poor Christians of Jerusalem. And we may regard this as only one illustration of that boundless compassion towards the miserable inhabitants of this sin-stricken world which every Christian community is bound by its allegiance to Christ to exhibit. Nothing is more certain than that no other excellence, and no combination of excellences, will compensate for the lack of this in the Church of our Saviour's charity. In this, and in nothing short of this, is its perfection.

Scarcely any reference has been made, in the interpretation of this Prayer, to the individual believer. In expounding most of St. Paul's devotional utterances, whether of supplication or of thanksgiving, the Christian man and the Christian Church have been as it were indistinguishable. Here, however, we have had a peculiar word to deal with: one that expressly demands an ecclesiastical application. But it must not be forgotten that every application of Scriptural truth must find its way to the individual, and only through the individual reaches the community. Every one who hears this short and earnest expression of St. Paul's "wish" must bethink himself of his own soul, and ask what there is in himself of disorder and imperfectness, and seek to bring his own heart into the "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," so making sure that his own part is contributed towards the Church's perfect harmony.

VIII.

UNITY.

"Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."—ROM. xv. 5, 6.

THE two prayers which are so closely connected in this chapter might, on the first glance, appear to be the broken fragments of one concluding supplication. But, when closely examined, they are found to be perfectly distinct, having each its own most appropriate reference to the general strain of the preceding Epistle. The former reverts to the blending of Jews and Gentiles in the one Church of Christ, and prays for the grace of unity in its manifestation towards each other and towards God. The latter takes up the fundamental doctrine of Christian salvation by faith, and prays for the abounding experience of the blessings of that salvation, as they are reserved for hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost. These petitions have their specific bearing upon the state of the Church on whose behalf they are offered; but, like all the prayers of St. Paul, they are so framed as to belong to the universal Church, in all its communities and in all its individual members. Hence we may fairly give them general titles, and expound them in their general application.

It will be observed at once that the several words here used are peculiar, scarcely one of them occurring in any of the other prayers. The customary invocation has a striking turn given to it, and the description of the unity

asked for is no less characteristic. In the interpretation of both we shall have more than usually to explore the context.

God is addressed as the God of patience and consolation. If we throw our eye backward, we see the meaning to be this, that God is the Giver of that stedfastness and encouragement which it is the design of the Holy Scriptures to inspire. The Apostle has just been paying a grand and precious tribute to the ancient oracles of the Old Testament as given for the instruction of Christians: which instruction, sealed upon the heart as passive patience and active comfort, feeds and strengthens the principle of hope. But the Scriptures, whether written aforetime or by the Apostles themselves, are only the instrument which God uses for the maintenance in our souls of a sure and efficacious confidence of future glory. This hope was the end of the Old Testament, realised in Christ; in Christ the same hope is raised to a higher life, expanded to embrace a larger object, and sustained by fuller promises. But we are still saved by hope. And the God of the Christian hope is still the God of patience and comfort. His Spirit still teaches us by the finished Scriptures to endure stedfastly, strong in the consolation of grace, until the sum of all Christian expectation is reached. Thus here, and here only, God receives a name derived from the Bible as His instrument. No higher testimony could be given to the written Word than this. The Scriptures are the power of God for the infusion into human souls of fortitude and strength. And God is the God of that patience and consolation which only through the Scriptures He imparts.

The connection between this invocation and the subject of the prayer will now be sufficiently obvious. But it requires us to remember St. Paul's habit of passing silently, as it were, and without warning, from a single and isolated quotation to the general scope of the Old-Testament Scrip-

tures, as well as his habit of leaving his readers to supply many of the links of his argument and exhortation. Had he filled up the measure of his meaning, many verses would have required to be inserted before the petition commenced. We must be bold to read his omissions into the text. His purpose was to exhort the Gentile and the Jewish Christians, or, in other words, the strong and the weak, to mutual self-renouncing forbearance, requiring "patience" on both sides, and mutual self-forgetting joy in the "consolation" of the Christian fellowship. Now both these exhortations the writer enforces, as his manner is, by an appeal to the sovereign authority, even Christ. As in the previous chapter he had solved the difficulty between the two parties by bringing both into the presence of the common Lord, at the foot of whose throne all dissensions should expire, even so he does now, but with a most affecting variation. First, he appeals to the Saviour's example of self-sacrifice, which he makes Him utter from the familiar sixty-ninth Psalm. Then he appeals to the Saviour's revealed will touching both Jews and Gentiles in their unity. Our prayer comes in as a parenthesis. Before we proceed to expound it, let us glance for a moment at the two branches of the exhortation.

The duty of self-sacrificing regard to the edification of others is a law of the Christian fellowship enforced by the example of Christ. He "pleased not Himself." This remarkable expression, which simply declares the one principle of the Redeemer's self-renunciation for the good of man, might have been illustrated by an appeal to the entire sum of His history. But the Apostle chooses instead an obscure word from a Messianic Psalm, in which a typical sufferer cries unto God, "The reproaches of them that reproached Thee fell on Me." He seems to put these words into the lips of Christ Himself; and they refer, not so much to His vicarious submission to judgment on behalf of man, as to His meek endurance of the indignities cast

upon Him on the way to that final judgment on the Cross. As the supreme self-sacrifice of redemption is the sum of all example, so our Lord's innumerable lesser abnegations bring that example home to our daily life. And here is the connection with our prayer. The suffering Christ, whether in His types in the Old Testament, or Himself the Antitype in the New, teaches His people to endure the contumely of the world and to bear with each other's mutual recriminations. There was grave need for this appeal to the last and highest argument. The church at Rome was in great danger. Bigotry on the weak side begat intolerance on the strong side; and the animosity that was common to the two was contrary to the first principles of the law and example of Christ. Hence the pregnant reference, which hints far more than it expresses, to the great lesson of self-sacrificing endurance taught throughout the Old Testament. Hence the solemn supplication to God that He would raise them to the high pitch of their duty by imparting to them the strength of His patience and consolation through the study of His Word.

Here comes in the prayer, then, as it were before its time. When it ends, the same exhortation to mutual forbearance and love is further enforced by the declared will of Christ Himself as the Fulfiller of ancient prophecies concerning the blending of Jews and Gentiles in the Church. The Apostle bids them "receive" one another: a word that must have its most intense meaning. The Jewish Christians should receive the Gentile and the Gentile the Jewish in the same spirit as that in which Christ had received both into equal fellowship with Himself, thus advancing the glory of God. The argument, if expanded, would be this. The common Redeemer of all men, for the manifestation of the highest glory of God, in the accomplishment of His purposes, admitted the two classes of mankind to the same privileges. He was in an especial manner the Minister of the circumcision, and the

first stage of His career limited his high service of the Father to the covenant People. Not only so, in every stage of His career He would minister to the glory of God by the exhibition of His truth in the fulfilment of all the promises to Israel. As the Redeemer He would never forget the tribes of the Election. But as He glorified the fidelity of God towards the covenant People, so also He glorified the mercy of God towards the Gentile nations. Here, however, the Apostle, by an exquisite refinement, changes His style. He returns to the Old-Testament predictions, all given "for our instruction," and chooses three which prove that in Christ the Gentiles also were to bring to the Author of redemption a tribute of glory as loud, and as full, and as lasting, as that which Israel should bring, and much more abundant.

First, the Redeemer Himself is their great Representative, and gathers their Catholic thanksgivings up into His own lips: "I will confess to Thee among the Gentiles." But the second makes them their own representative, and commands all the nations by a double prophecy to join the ancient people in their praises: "Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with His people." The third lays the common foundation of both in a prediction of Isaiah, that the true David should "reign over the Gentiles," and that "in Him the Gentiles should trust." At this point the Apostle bursts into a second prayer; but the entire assemblage of these quotations belongs to the first, and are really, though following it, its introduction. They explain the great Hope which the Old Testament, interpreted by Christ, inspires. They give the reason why the God of the Apostle's supplication derives His title from the "patience and consolation" of Scripture in the one prayer, and from its "hope" in the other. They finally illustrate the phrascology of the petitions now to be considered, so far as they have a specific reference to the Church at Rome. Against the latent discord and manifest

dissension between the two parties the entire volume of the Old Testament protested. The root of this evil was neglect of the "instruction" given by the prophets, forgetfulness of the great "hope" they announced to universal man, and slowness of heart to learn the "patience and consolation" which their predictions, through the Spirit's grace, infuse. To the mind of St. Paul it concerned the highest glory of God that the ancient distinction between Gentile and Jew should be utterly abolished and forgotten. To this high level of contemplation he had long since risen with Christ. To this high level the Christians of Rome had not risen. A large concluding section of his Epistle is devoted to the endeavour to raise them out of their unevangelical position: a labour of love which engaged his whole soul. His arguments are enforced by the example and teaching of Christ, by the supreme revelation of the glory of the Divine counsel, and by the blessedness of the common patience, consolation, and hope of the Gospel. But here, as everywhere, his mightiest argument is prayer. It is his manner whenever he would stimulate his readers to the highest achievements and attainments of grace, or impress upon them the importance of some great forgotten duty, to make them kneel with him. This observation may be verified by a glance at the long series of his Epistles: the solitary exception being that to the Galatians. On the present occasion he can scarcely wait till the argument proper is ended. He breaks off midway, and cries: "May that God who gives patience and strength through the Scriptures grant you to have but one sentiment of love towards each other, even as Christ has but one feeling towards you, holding you all equally dear: may He give you one faith towards Him who is not the God of Jews and of Gentiles respectively, but of one common humanity in the Person of Jesus Christ; that you may, with one unvaried and accordant confession, glorify Him in the name of the One Saviour of all."

But the Prayer has survived its original purpose; it belongs to the universal Church, and has its relation to every community, with an obligation resting upon each individual confessor of the name of Jesus. Unity is the one topic that emerges out of the whole: the unity of brotherly love, the unity of common faith in the mediatorial God, and the unity of a worshipping confession. Each of these is the gift of God, but only a gift of God that blesses the effort of man to attain. All that has to be said on this unity in general has been anticipated in the exposition of the Prayer in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians. But there is one feature peculiar to this passage which will amply repay our attention. It is the unity of mind and voice in the glorification of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Those who mind the same thing in the concord of brotherly love must make His name the centre of unity: that seems to be the meaning of "according to Christ Jesus;" His name is the standard of union, and not its example. So, also, their union in the purest worship of the Gospel is the unity of thought and word in the confession of the Divine Father of the Person of Christ. In other words, the confession and adoration of God in Christ, with all that is involved in it, is the bond of unity in the worship of the Christian Church.

Our English translation, "God even the Father of our Lord," does not expressly indicate this, or rather expresses it in a diluted form. The word "even" is needless. The sacred formula throughout St. Paul's writings is always faithful to our Lord's own saying, "I ascend to My God and your God," which declares at once an immeasurable difference and an essential unity between His relation and ours to the common Father. To the Ephesians "The God of our Lord Jesus Christ" is the object of Christian prayer as He is here the object of Christian praise. In that passage the acknowledgment of our Saviour's incarnate

Eph. i. 17.

relation to God is said to be the highest wisdom of revelation, as we shall hereafter see; in this passage the relation of God to the Incarnate Saviour is said to be the subject of highest worship. There is no difficulty in understanding this, if we remember that in the mystery of Christ's Person God in all His fulness is revealed to us; but not simply as God, rather as God incarnate, the Godhead
Col. ii. 9. "dwelling bodily in His fulness" in Christ. In the Mediatorial economy of the Trinity the Father is God, as it were absolutely; the Son incarnate, one with the Father in eternal dignity, is in the dispensation of grace and the return of glory subordinate as Mediator; the Spirit proceedeth from the Father and the Son as, touching redemption, subordinate to both. The bold but reverent maintenance of this truth is necessary if we would form a right theory of New-Testament devotion. It does not by any means imperil the coequal dignity of the other Persons of the Trinity, who, "for a season if need be," are the Father's Ministers in the execution of His will. The glorification of the Son is included in that of the Father, if we remember that the Father is the "God of Jesus
1 Cor. xi. 3. Christ:" that is, not the "Head of Christ" simply, but the God who, in the redeeming manifestation of the Trinity, is known only as revealed in the Son. The "Christ of God" is the "God of Christ;" and the "God of Christ" is really "God in Christ." So, also, in the neighbouring prayer the "power of the Holy Ghost" is no less than the Divine power of a Personal Agent; for, in this sense also, "there is no power but of God." While all prayer goes up to the Father through the Mediator by the Holy Spirit, it is the Holy Trinity in the Person of the Father who receives human supplication. And, while all praise glorifies the God and Father of Jesus Christ, the only God whom mortals know, it is the praise of the Triune God that the Father, if such language may be allowed, representatively receives. The right understanding of all this depends

upon our sound conceptions of the two temporal Missions of the Son and the Spirit: on these two subordinations, received in the simplicity of Christian faith, hang all the mysteries of the worship of redemption.

The glorification of God as revealed in the Person of Christ is here said to be a confession of the common mind and common voice of the Church. There is no express distinction between the faith and the worship. The faith is the body of the worship, and the worship the spirit of the faith: but these two are one. How all Divine doctrine and Divine praise are wrapped up in the knowledge and acknowledgment of God in Christ we shall more fully see when we come to the Ephesian Prayers. The one thought that is peculiar to our present passage, which therefore must be pointed out particularly, is the petition that God would grant this unity of confession. St. Paul prays that the Romans might live together in peace, minding the same thing "according to Christ Jesus." And then he rises to the highest manifestation of that unity in their glorifying God with one mind and one mouth. Both gifts are Divine. It is God that maketh men to be of one mind in a house; and it is the same God who by His Spirit reveals that knowledge on which a true worshipping confession is based. This is the abiding need of the Church; and the supply of this need is the supply of all need. It is a perversion of our Prayer, a perversion as superficial as it is dangerous, to say that the unity of the Christian confession is secured if men agree to worship the common Father through Christ. The confession here referred to includes all the fundamentals of complete evangelical truth. It is a very large, and full, and glorious acknowledgment of the "mystery of God and of Christ." There is no petition more important than this in the present day. When we offer it in these times, we must forget the divisions of the church at Rome. There are divisions among us in comparison of which the

differences of the Jewish and Gentile Christians, however critical, were slight. When St. Paul wrote the Epistle to the Romans there were two evils that interfered with the unity of faith: that of the "weak," who in their bigotry limited the Gospel; that of the "strong," who in their license would make it too free. The same evils reign after long centuries of the Spirit's administration; but they are intensified and aggravated, and give but slight signs of arrest. Bigotry and Latitudinarianism still fight against the simplicity of faith. Our refuge is in the charity, on the one hand, that cultivates brotherly love "according to Christ Jesus;" and, on the other, the fervent prayer which maintains a sound confession in preaching and teaching whilst it supplicates the universal outpouring of the Spirit of truth. Our Lord's witnesses on earth, bearing their testimony against a multitude of errors, must unite in this Prayer of the Apostle, remembering amidst all their discouragements the special attribute here given to the Hearer of their prayer, "The God of patience and consolation."

IX.

HOPE.

"Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost."—ROM. xv. 13.

THIS Prayer is closely connected with the preceding. The more immediate and obvious link seems to be the final word of the quotation, "In Him shall the Gentiles hope;" but, if we look closely, we see that the note of hope had been struck before: "that we through the patience and consolation of Scripture might have the hope." We need not, however, pause on the connection. The Apostle has lost sight of it, and gives us his solitary petition for this grace of the Christian life in a manner perfectly independent, thus adding an element indispensable to the completeness of the series of his Apostolic Supplications. Hope is its one subject, whether we regard the God to whom it is addressed, or the fulness of the blessing which it asks.

The Author of redemption derives some of the most precious among His many names from the Gospel which manifests His glory. As that Gospel rests upon an accomplished propitiation, He is "the God of grace," "the Father of mercies," with an abundance of attributes attending these names; as that Gospel displays its present effects in the souls of men, He is "the God of peace," and His name of names is Love; as that Gospel reserves its blessedness for the future, especially the final future, He is "the God of hope." Hence it is an undue limitation to make this mean "the Giver of hope." The signification

is rather that God is the Author and Fountain of the entire Christian salvation, as it is not yet revealed and imparted. This includes both a wide range and an interminable perspective. Taking the former, there is hardly an aspect of the redeeming work which "the God of hope" does not preside over. The Son whom He has sent is "Jesus Christ, which is our hope;" the Gospel is the foundation of a great hope; the Christian vocation is summed up in hope; salvation is our comprehensive hope. Taking the latter, the future is a glorious sequence of revelations which the God of hope has yet to disclose. There is the hope of the glorious appearing of God and our Saviour; the hope of the resurrection, which is the redemption of all past pledges, and the new earnest of all that is to come; the hope of righteousness by faith, which, although already imparted, is to be sealed as a final declaration of righteousness through Christ imputed and imparted; the hope of salvation, as the final deliverance from every evil that our nature has ever known; the hope of eternal life, as more than mere deliverance; the hope of glory, which admits no paraphrase but the word perfection. Now, it would be easy to show that every one of these forms of the one great Gospel blessing is referred to God as its Author. And when He is called "the God of the hope," we must give the expression a wide meaning. As He is the God of Creation, Redemption, and Providence, so also He is the God of the Gospel hope.

1 Tim. i. 1. Col. i. 23. Eph. i. 18. 1 Thess. v. 8. Rom. viii. 20, 24. Titus ii. 13. 1 Thess. iv. 13. Gal. v. 5. 1 Thess. v. 8. Rom. vii. 20. Titus i. 2, iii. 7. Col. i. 27. Rom. v. 2; 2 Cor. iii. 12.

But the Prayer refers to the establishment, assurance, and abundance of the Christian hope as imparted by the Holy Spirit to believers. Though other terms are found here, it may easily be seen that they pay their tribute to this one grace; and it is the observation of this fact that gives the interpretation its only key. Faith is the root of hope; the peace and joy which are the fruits of faith are the nourishment of hope; and the abundance

of hope is here in a certain sense made the perfection of the Christian life as it is a life of probation.

Faith and hope are within the soul so united and inseparable, that the only definition of both contained in Scripture makes them all but identical: "Faith is the substance of things hoped for." They are one in this, that their objects are invisible: "Faith is the evidence of things not seen," and "we hope for that we see not." But they always and essentially differ in this, that in the administration of salvation faith has to do with the present, and hope with the future; or, rather, that faith brings the past, and hope the future, into the reality of the present moment. Faith and hope blend in the experience of the "now" that is; but faith brings its assurance of a mercy resting upon the work already wrought, and hope its assurance of a salvation yet to be revealed. Faith rests upon the "It is finished," already spoken; hope rejoices in the assurance of another "It is finished," which the creation waits to hear. But, while they thus are counterparts, it is obvious that faith must have the preeminence, as being the parent of hope. We may conceive of a faith without hope, shut up to the present moment, however difficult the conception may be; but we cannot conceive of a hope that does not believe in its object. Hence, when the Apostle is about to invoke upon the Romans the abundance of Christian hope, he utters his prayer in a circuitous manner, and takes faith on the way: "May the God of hope fill you with joy and peace in believing, in order that ye may abound in hope" as the fruit of that abounding faith.

Heb. xi. 1.

Rom. viii. 25.

There is, further, an evident connection in St. Paul's mind between the fruits of faith and the abounding in hope. The Prayer borrows from the previous chapter that part of the definition of the internal kingdom which refers to the graces of experience: "peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." It is hard to separate between these two, almost

Rom. xiv. 17.

as hard as to discern between soul and spirit. But those who are accustomed to study the subtleties of St. Paul's phraseology, when the economy of salvation is concerned, will be prepared to allow that peace is the blessed settlement of the controversy between God and the sinner as respects the past; while joy is the present good cheer of the soul as encompassed by mercies, but feeling the present rather than thinking of the past or the future. "We joy in God through Jesus Christ," by whom we have received the peace of the Reconciliation. Now these two demand imperatively a third, to fill up the measure of the Christian estate: peace touching the guilty past, and joy in the fruitful present, do not so much cry out for as naturally produce good hope for the unknown future.

But of all these there may be measures and degrees. Nothing is more characteristic of St. Paul's Christianity than his perpetual emphasis on the increase, even unto perfection, of every grace of godliness. It would be hard to mention one for the fulness of which he has not expressly hoped or prayed on behalf of his people. He is a most generous interpreter of the privileges of grace. In some form or other the notion of fulness enters into every department of his practical theology. Here we have set before us as the object of prayer the abundance of peace and joy and hope as the result of the abounding power in us of the Holy Ghost. It is uncertain whether or not the Apostle meant to connect the Spirit's operation with the increase of all the three in believers' hearts. It is more probable that the faith, with its two first-born graces, referred to Christ in whom the Gentiles should "trust," and that the hope, its later offspring, is referred to the operation of the Comforter. But this is matter of slight importance: certain it is that faith, with all that springs from it, is of the operation of the Holy Ghost, whose "power" in the soul, as that of a personal Agent, tends ever to increase where it is nourished, and with its increase

enlarges the range and deepens the character of all the graces.

We have seen how characteristic it is of St. Paul that he never prays for anything short of the "fulness" of these graces. The notion of abounding plenitude he throws into every kind of variation of which language would afford him the forms: in fact, a consecutive chain of these passages which have the "sound of abundance' in them would be a rich transcript of his mind. But it is a term that reluctantly submits to exposition. It is chiefly to be defined by negatives, though the negatives are positive enough for man's desire. To be filled with peace is to be dispossessed of the last residue of servile dread before God, and to have risen beyond the possibility of unholy resentments towards man: and for this the Apostle prays as among the blessings of the Christian heritage. To be filled with joy is at least to have vanquished all the sorrow of the world, to find elements of rejoicing even in tribulation, and to possess a serene contentment of heart that finds nothing wrong in nature, providence, or grace: this also he asks as the common privilege of Christian men. To abound in hope is a grace that he expresses by another word: a word that rather brings the answer of the prayer down into the region of our own endeavour. The God and Giver of hope bestows its increase rather as the fruit of our own passive patience under suffering and strenuous fortitude in resisting discouragement. Hence the marked allusion to the "power of the Holy Ghost." Hope is strengthened by the habit of endurance and the habit of resistance. And these are habits which beyond all others require the Divine strength within us. While all graces demand the in-working of the Holy Ghost, these demand His "power." It is not without reference to this that we are said to be "saved by hope;" and that our helmet is "the hope of salvation." 1 Thess. v. 8.

It must not be forgotten that the abounding in hope is prayed for as the end and result of the fulness of joy and peace. This indicates, on the one hand, that these more tranquil graces are instruments for the attainment of that more strenuous grace; and, on the other hand, it seems to make hope the consummate probationary sentiment of the Christian character. A few words on each of these points are all that are now necessary.

"That ye may abound in hope:" joy and peace minister to hope. The assurance of reconciliation with God in Christ, the tranquillity of soul which springs from conscious salvation from guilt and fear, cannot rest in itself: it must needs muse upon that which is to come. If what has been said is true, that peace in its essence is a sure sense of deliverance from all the consequences of the past, through the grace of our Lord's propitiation, how can it but encourage the expectation of all the fruits of a justified state and of the adoption to an inheritance? We
1 Pet. i. 3. are "begotten again unto a lively hope." The soul, no longer weighed down under the burden of sin, by a holy necessity springs upward; and every upward aspiration
Rom. viii. 32. is hope. "How shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" is not merely St. Paul's theological deduction, it is the silent inference of every new-born spirit. Peace is not hope, but it sets hope free. Until the pardon is sealed, all that the future has is a ministration of death. With the regenerate life of justification hope revives and fear dies. So also joy, by an equally Divine necessity, encourages endurance and fortitude and the hopeful expectation of the great release. Hope in this case of
Rom. v. 2. course ministers as it is ministered unto. We "rejoice in hope of the glory of God." The glorious prospect gladdens the soul, and enables it to count tribulation joy. But that refers to the "consolation" of hope. Its "patience," which enters so largely into Christian experience, is nourished by the joy which the Holy Ghost

imparts. For, every reviving and cheering influence of the Spirit strengthens the spirit to encounter its difficulties and privations and temptations. Every inspiration of Christian rejoicing, whether from the Divine immediate contact with the soul, or imparted through the word of promise, is a direct earnest of future happiness. As such it must invigorate and exalt the Christian's hope. Hence the habitual reference to encouragement of hope as the proximate, though not ultimate, design of all God's dealings with His people. Directly or indirectly the nourishment of this grace is constantly made the end of the Spirit's dispensations of His influence. But nowhere more impressively than in this Prayer, which makes the abounding of joy and peace subsidiary to the abounding of hope, and connects with this last result the rarely-used expression, "by the power of the Holy Ghost."

It is scarcely too much, then, to say finally that hope is in some sense the highest of the probationary graces. It is the servant of many of them, but it is itself served by all. So far as the estate of probation is concerned, simply and as such, what would everything else be without this? The mere imagination of the withdrawal of hope withers the rest and wraps all in darkness. It might seem a hard and thankless task to compare the graces, but St. Paul has set us the example. In his comparison we know that charity has the preeminence by every right: it is of the Divine nature, it binds together time and eternity, heaven and earth, and God and man; it survives eternally. But, as the grace of our stern probation, hope has its own peculiar preeminence. It imparts its strength to all other graces, so that they without it cannot be made perfect. It divides the triumphs of faith, it enters largely into the self-denials and labours of love. As it respects the present life, rounded by the last conflict of death, hope is in some sense "the abiding grace." There are many seasons when

all would be lost but for its secret strength. There comes a supreme moment to all when hope—or we may say "faith working by hope"—is the only anchor of the soul. And, when it has endured its final strain, it will, like faith and charity, be glorified for ever. For hope is in reality an imperishable grace, as the others are. The eternity of love needs no advocate. Nor can any one doubt that faith will never be swallowed up of sight: there will be a boundless realm for faith that the eye of even the glorified shall never penetrate. And with all its fruition, hope will have its everlasting anticipation of glories not yet revealed. But it is not of our hope in eternity that this Prayer speaks: rather of an eternal hope. For the never-failing abundance of this "very present help in trouble" let every Christian make his humble supplication to Him who has suffered Himself to be called by this name, "THE GOD OF HOPE."

X.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE DIVINE WILL.

"For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness; giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son: in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins."—COL. i. 9—14.

THE Prayers inlaid into the Epistle to the Colossians are distinguished from most of the others by their diffuseness; but, like all the rest, they are under the law of a strict unity. They embrace the entire Christian life, in almost every aspect of it; and at the same time gather up their several elements into relation to one idea, the knowledge of God. The two intercessions consider that knowledge under different points of view; in the former it is the knowledge and obedience of God's will, in the second it is the knowledge of God's Mystery, Christ. By making these two ideas our starting points, we shall best be able to collect the substance of the two petitions as they flow almost without break into the general body of the doctrine that follows, and also to exhibit the remarkable symmetry which governs these in common with all the Apostle's devotional paragraphs.

The former of the two petitions, which we now study, asks, first, for the bestowment of a knowledge of the Divine will, as attained by a spiritual understanding and wisdom;

secondly, for the practical conformity with that will, actively in good works, passively in perfect endurance, and in the thankfulness that should pervade both.

The faith and charity of the Colossians had been so reported to the Apostle as to fill his heart with thankfulness; which took its habitual course, that of unceasing prayer on their behalf. "Do not cease to pray for you" is an affectionate hyperbole which needs no explanation, as coming from him who gave the precept, "Pray without ceasing." Blending the subject of his prayer with his purpose in offering it, St. Paul asks generally that they might be "filled with the knowledge of the Divine will," and particularly as that knowledge is to be in "all spiritual wisdom and understanding."

To be "filled with the knowledge of the Divine will" comprises three terms, which in their union signify an impartation from above of a penetrating and thorough insight into the nature of the will of God as directing the practical life. Based on the eternal purpose of redemption, this will of God is specially the counsel of human sanctification. As matter of request it is the Holy Spirit's operation on the human faculties which makes the knowledge living and experimental: translating the external law into an internal; rewriting on the tablets of the heart the moral law which had been all but effaced, and filling the heart with the sense of its supremacy. But the Apostle closely connects with this the "spiritual wisdom and understanding" which bring Divine knowledge down into the sphere of the human faculties. As the Holy Spirit alone can impart it, so He imparts it only through the "understanding" which makes every aspect of the Divine will the object of study, and aggregates the whole into "wisdom," which is the practical application to life of all those precepts which the understanding severally embraces. But both the limited understanding and the unlimited wisdom are "spiritual," as distinguished from the workings

of both in the merely "natural" man. The unregenerate "understanding" may make the moral law in its individual requirements the object of study, and arrange the whole into a system of rules for the "wisdom" of merely human ethics. But in the regenerate all this becomes spiritual: the individual precepts are studied in the light of love and the new nature, and the whole wisdom of holiness is the result of a teaching that is "from above." James i. 17.

The Prayer when analysed distributes the practical application of this wisdom into three ranges of religious experience: the fruitfulness, the endurance, and the thankfulness, of personal religion.

Nowhere have we a more complete view of the perfect Christian life as it is the outward exhibition of interior grace. Every word answers to that idea of fulness—"filled with the knowlege of His will"—which is the key-note: the walk is to be absolutely worthy of the Lord Himself in "all" well pleasing; the abundance of the good works is to be seen in every department, and by the knowledge of God there must be increase even in this completeness. But the order of the supplications must be changed in the exposition of them; we have the evergrowing fruitfulness of the holy character, and its complete response to the will of God.

First comes the fruitfulness in every good work. The figure and the reality are blended according to the Scriptural custom: the holiness of the regenerate is the fruit of a tree of life within him, while at the same time it is the sum of his own habits and acts. The figure evermore suggests, and keeps in view, that all the manifestations of godliness are the fruit of a Divine life within; that it is Christ indwelling by His Spirit who produces all that is good in us; that the source of every the slightest thought or word or deed of religion is the life and energy of the Holy Ghost. Hence the habitual use of this figure by our Lord and His Apostles. But to teach another lesson the

figure is always linked with the fact, and by it qualified. The phrase "every good work" teaches that the thoughts, words, and deeds of holiness are our own; as much our own as their sinful opposites ever were. As in the beginning so in the continuous process of grace there is a perfect union as it were into one hypostatic personality, of the Divine and human. The fruits of the Divine in the soul are the works of the human will: in their secret source they have a heavenly origin, in their outward manifestation they are the human actions of a human life under human conditions. But it is the wonderful idea of completeness that here arrests the attention. "In every good work:" the tree of life brings forth, not "twelve manner of fruits" simply, but all the fruits that the infinite diversity of the relations of life permit; and the one "good work" of religion is multiplied into every possible act of obedience to God, and charity to man, and devout imitation of Christ. According to the infallible canon for the interpretation of these Prayers there is nothing in the aspiration which may not be fulfilled in the experience. Hence the Christian life may be one "filled with all goodness."

The true reading of the next sentence gives here an instructive turn to the thought. The words "increasing by the knowledge of God" suggest that the fruitfulness of the Christian life knows no limitation: that its perfection has not such a character of completeness as admits no further development; that, in short, as the knowledge of God and His will grows, the fruits of obedience grow likewise. St. Paul does not mean that practical godliness leads to progress in the knowledge of God; but, conversely, that a daily advancing in the knowledge of God, that is, of God's will in its application to ever developing life, leads to richer fruitfulness in good works. It may be said that the two are one. And they are one in a very profound sense. We rise through duty to a knowledge of God; and, with growing sanctity, the

notion of the Divine Being becomes more clear and cloudless to the soul. But the general spirit of this Prayer recommends the other view, which indeed is more consonant with the true reading of the text, that the enlarging knowledge of the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God, as "proved" in the varying applications of that will in daily life, leads to an unlimited increase of good works. To the Christian man every day brings a new dispensation of duty; the interior law of his God unfolds perpetually new obligations; and, as the law broadens in the field of its application, the obedient life puts on new aspects of perfection. The tree is for ever bearing fruit; for the secret life that feeds it knows no limit to its development; it is that of which our Lord said, "I am come that they may have life, and that they might have it more." And the life is always adding to its sum of good works: they may fill every moment, make every circumstance of the day contribute, and stamp their character upon every the most evanescent movement of the soul. But in all this it is taken for granted that the knowledge of God's will, which is the instrument of a never-ending increase of holiness, is a spiritual, living, and obedient knowledge.

Jno. x. 10.

We now go back to the glowing words which precede: "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing." They present a standard to which religion may aspire, which it may indeed surely reach. That standard is twofold: such a daily walk as should do honour to God, and such an aim to secure His approval as should win His complacency always and in all things. It must not be forgotten that this petition is intended, like every other similar prayer, to impress upon the minds of all who read it what the design of the Christian should be in all things.

The Christian may aim, without undue ambition, at a walk worthy of Christ: worthy of His most holy reli-

gion, worthy of His Sermon on the Mount, worthy of His own personal holiness! This is a most remarkable word: the highest and most stimulating of many of a like nature which the Apostle uses to rouse us to a sense of the dignity of our vocation. There is not a single Epistle in which he has not used the appeal to a consciousness of the unspeakable grandeur of the Christian profession. But none of his other inspiriting appeals rises to the level of this: "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord!" We are too much in the habit of hurrying over such words, and letting them melt into the general effect of the sentence. But this is one which deserves to retain its individuality, to be taken out of the context, and pondered deeply, until we become amazed at its significance. Can any aim be higher than that of being worthy of the Lord? Hardly less impressive is its fellow in the sentence, "Unto all well-pleasing:" this also, like the former member, is a word that never elsewhere recurs. If it is not to be robbed of its meaning by the usual artifices that tone down St. Paul's enthusiasm, it represents it as the simple possibility of life to please the Sovereign Arbiter of human conduct with whom there is no respect of persons, who judgeth according to every man's work! There is a daring completeness in the sentence: "Unto all well-pleasing!" There is no reservation for human infirmity, no undertone of deprecation of the Divine severity, no hint of a tolerant construction of our conduct in the forbearance of our Lord! The Christian standard is the constant increase in all good works through the ever-enlarging knowledge of God's will, a conversation worthy of the design of redemption, and in all things after the Lord's own heart. In the blessed confidence of this Prayer the beloved Son in whom the Father is well pleased reflects that perfect complacency upon all who are truly His in the unity of His incarnate life.

And now a shadow falls upon the description of religion: not a shadow of sin, but a shadow of care. The negative side of the Christian walk is its endurance of the trials of life; and this is presented as a passive "patience" combined with an active, resolute "long-suffering," both being the result of the plenary infusion of the glory of the Divine strength acting in every kind of energy upon the human faculties. The ideas are all general, but the sentence is one which, as a whole, gives this view also of religious experience an unspeakable dignity.

While the bestowment of Divine knowledge is regarded as the instrument or energy of the holy life, it is the Divine power which is especially connected with the patience of that holiness. It is the strength of God of course in both which accomplishes all; but that strength is "made perfect in weakness." The interior discipline of religion is both endurance and resistance: endurance of what is imposed and must be submitted to, and that is the "patience" of our Prayer; resistance of all temptation to rebel, and that is its "long-suffering" or magnanimity. For both St. Paul supplicates; and teaches us to depend upon an assistance from above which is literally unlimited, being "according to the measure of the power which it is the glory of God to put forth," and in us unlimited also, because it is manifested in "every kind of strength." Thus the grandeur of the Christian conflict is that the omnipotence of God is brought down into the secret arena of the struggle. He who outwardly "spoiled principalities and powers," making a show of them openly, triumphing over them in His cross, now inwardly and secretly carries on the same war on the field of the believer's experience. He infuses into the soul every kind of strength: strength to bear the inflictions of the Divine will, in the sorrows of life, in the disappointments of temporal expectation, in the innumerable oppositions of

Col. ii. 15.

evil, in the inexhaustible varieties of the pressure of the one great cross; strength to resist temptations from without, in the assaults of Satan, in the waywardness of men, in the persecutions of the haters of Christ, and in all the constant demand upon resolution and energy for the resistance of evil. It is this which explains the sudden surprise of the transition "with joyfulness." If it be that Divine strength is working in the Christian's experience, and as it were reserving the very "glory" of its power for the conflicts of that experience, surely the believer should, to use St. Peter's word, "count it all joy" to be undergoing temptation. St. Paul does not, however, merely say that patience and fortitude lead to joyfulness: the "unto" which pervades the Prayer becomes changed into "with." The joy accompanies the struggle; it is, so to speak, engendered by it. There is its own secret, mysterious, and unspeakable blessedness in the feeling of victory within through the power of God. But not only in the feeling of victory. The very conflict itself is joyous, if Divine and human strength unite: the spirit feels more surely in this than almost in any other of its experiences that it is one with Christ. And, in the last analysis, it is the boundless joy of the Redeemer Himself, conquering afresh within His saints, which is diffused, as He knows well how to diffuse it, through the otherwise exhausted faculties of His tempted people.

This comprehensive intercession now includes in its description of the perfect life thanksgiving, as one of the three elements of the Christian walk. Not, however, as one that stands apart from the rest, and is their supplement; but as one that enters into all. In the New Testament thanksgiving may be said to be the pervading grace, preeminently; it is scarcely ever alluded to without some reference to its being spread abroad through the thought and being and life. It is remarkable that the gratitude inculcated and prayed for as the perfection of personal religion is here

made to spring from the sense of redemption, and that alone. In such a comprehensive view of godliness we might have expected to find the other benefits of God's hand acknowledged. But it appears plain—and in this passage perhaps more than in any other—that, since the perfecting of the redeeming scheme, all the unnumbered benedictions of providence have become redemptional, and are to be classed among "the other benefits of His passion." To pass from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's Son is not to leave the kingdom of nature and providence. The kingdoms of this world have, in this sense also, become the kingdom of our Lord. The inheritance of the saints in light includes all the blessings of this world, sanctified now and as it were glorified. They have, in fact, become spiritual things in Christ Jesus.

When we examine further, to ascertain what the Apostle's arrangement of the thanksgiving is, we are more at a loss than before. A studied order there is: for he never composes a prayer without that. We see at once that the Christian's gratitude is gratitude for the redemption in the blood of Jesus, and that this redemption is viewed as regeneration in the light, as the restoration of an inheritance, and as the forgiveness of sins. At that point does the Prayer end? Strictly speaking, it does not. It flows on into a doxology to the glory of the only-begotten Son, and without any suspension of its breath goes whithersoever that theme leads it, until this chapter flows into the next, and we find ourselves in another Prayer. Obviously, therefore, we must limit ourselves to the thanksgiving as based upon our own experience of the great redemption.

Thanksgiving, however, does not carefully analyse. It does not distinguish precisely between the benefits of redemption as they are deliverance from evil, and as they are restoration to forfeited good. It does not, for a

moment, forget the distinction. But it cannot pause to take account of it and present to God its theological definition. And what the Apostle's Prayer does not do our exposition of it must avoid. Suffice that, generally, the burden of Christian gratitude is the experience of being "made meet," or fitted for, the estate of Christians. The word used by the Apostle is a general one, and embraces all that is meant by being placed in a capacity of enjoying the blessings of religion. Elsewhere the same idea we have seen expressed as being "counted worthy of God's kingdom." The "inheritance" is the whole estate of Christian privilege which the redeeming power of Christ has recovered; and our "portion" in it as "partakers" refers to the secret and sure experience of every believing Christian that he is one of the children of God, by the adoption of grace, and so has a title to an inheritance by adoption which he already enjoys in his regeneration. For it is regeneration that underlies the whole: the "making meet" includes the renewal of the nature, as does the "translation from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God's dear Son." Now, while the regenerating grace of redemption is in view, the Apostle is contented to term it "light." The inheritance is that of the saints in the light of Christian knowledge and enjoyment and purity: they are in the "light" of the outer court now, as they will hereafter be in the "glory" into which that light will finally deepen. But the Prayer reserves the greatest word for the last: we have in redemption, through the paying down of the ransom-price of Christ's blood, the remission of sins which could not otherwise be forgiven. Thus the thanksgiving winds up with redemption: which, viewed in relation to our sins, is the rescue from their curse by forgiveness, in relation to our doom is the restoration of our inheritance, in relation to our character is the translation into a sphere of the light of holiness.

When the Apostle reaches this word, we hardly know

whether he is rising to doxology or descending to theological teaching. We must leave him at this point with one sentence lingering in our thoughts, a sentence which gives the reason and at the same time the expression of all Christian thanksgiving: "Thanks be unto God for the gift of His redeeming Son, the Son of His Love."

XI.

THE FULL ASSURANCE OF KNOWLEDGE.

"For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words."—COL. ii. 1—4.

THE second Colossian Prayer rises if possible into a higher region. It is the sequel of the first, inasmuch as it shows at once the end of all practical obedience, and the ground of all practical knowledge in the "acknowledgment of the mystery of God which is Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

It is scarcely necessary to prove that we are justified in numbering this among St. Paul's Prayers. The words that introduce it not only show that it is a supplement of the petition in the former chapter, but also that the Apostle's request now deepens into "great conflict," or agony. Not only for the Colossians, but for all whose faith he had not had the opportunity of confirming by personal instruction, therefore for us also, St. Paul pours out his soul with an intensity of desire which is akin to our Lord's own agony, and which he seems as if he longed to make them know and make them share: "I would that ye knew how great agony I have!" As to the matter of his supplication, it is expressed in the form of the end that its answer would obtain: the full assurance of their understanding of Christ, the mystery of God. We shall enter into the spirit of it if we consider how this is to be obtained: "that their hearts

might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of full assurance;" what it is in itself, "the full assurance of the mystery of God which is Christ;" and what this effects as a spiritual safeguard from "philosophy and vain deceit." A Prayer more important for all times, and especially for these times, we cannot ponder or make our own.

It is hardly possible to separate the "full assurance" here prayed for from the processes by which it is reached. It is a branch, together with the "knitting together in love," of the one common trunk, "the comfort of the heart." This last root-principle of all religious establishments must not be limited in its meaning to the mere consolation of the heart in trouble, or even in its invigoration in grace; it must be understood, as we have elsewhere seen, to signify the full work of the Paraclete within the soul. The "heart" is not the seat of the affections, but the inner man, the true person in whom the Holy Ghost carries on His renewing work, shedding abroad both the love and the truth of God. Hence from this common principle spring two developments, one of charity and the other of knowledge; and these are united, though separate, for the edification in love is "unto all the riches of the full assurance of the understanding." The love of God strong in the heart of each, and in the heart of each the "bond of perfectness," is, as "brotherly love," the bond of a union in which all are edified or built up together into the common fellowship of the body of Christ. Thus while "knowledge," carnal knowledge, "puffeth up" the individual, and makes also a hollow fellowship, "love buildeth up" both the individual and the community of saints. "Growing up together as a holy temple," they share together the revelations of the Divine mysteries which belong to the temple. They have the riches of the knowledge of God imparted to them, in the radiations of Divine light through the Word by the Holy Spirit. These

riches are the common heritage of the sacred Treasury; they are possessed only in the Church of the living saints, for the compact fellowship of love alone leads "unto all the riches of the full assurance of the understanding." But, while the riches are the common stock, every one's individual "knowledge" is his own: hence follows, "unto the full acknowledgment of the mystery of God which is Christ." Thus, all that is meant by this deep privilege belongs to each Christian who joins the Apostle in his agony to attain it. This cannot be too constantly remembered. Whatever treasures of Divine revelation the fellowship of Christians may possess, there can be no common "knowledge." Each must know and be assured for himself.

But what is "the full assurance of the understanding?" It is no other than such a clear, deep, undoubting confidence in the reality of the objects of knowledge which the understanding grasps as excludes all present hesitation and fortifies the mind against the suggestions of error. This great grace comes from the operation of the Holy Ghost, "comforting the heart," but it comes through the diligent study of the mystery hid in Christ. It is one of the highest blessings that the soul in this life can attain, and hence is spoken of as the result and crown of love. But this particular grace will best be understood by comparing it with other forms of it as exhibited by St. Paul. He speaks of three kinds of full assurance; that of faith, that of hope, and that of the understanding. In one sense, these three are various forms of the same thing; the sure conviction of the reality of the objects personally trusted in, hoped for, and apprehended in knowledge. Yet they are quite distinct in the Apostle's theology. The full assurance of faith is the Divinely-wrought conviction of the reality, and the possession of the present object: the same Spirit who quickens into life faith in God's promise gives the internal assurance that it is fulfilled, and that in such

swift succession that it is impossible to distinguish between faith and assurance. There is a difference however: and it is only in the highest perfection of the act of saving faith that it is thus its own evidence of its object. There are stages of faith by which it travels towards this goal; but in this it has its perfect work. The assurance of hope is in like manner the full conviction of the reality of its objects as our own in reservation. Hope also may pass through its many stages: in full assurance it also puts on its perfection, being released from every doubt as to the existence of its object, and from every present fear as to its being reserved for the soul, in its present position of faith. Beyond this it cannot go: it would not be the assurance of hope if it were the assurance of an eternal and inalienable salvation. The only Christian assurance of salvation is for the present moment: running on indeed into a state, as a point flows on into the line, but only for the present. The instant it turns to the future, it is hope: hope that is full of assurance and without fear, but only hope. Now the full assurance of understanding differs from these in being more general in its object; including all the truths of the common salvation, all the facts that make up saving truth, of the unity, harmony, and practical consequences of which the understanding is fully assured. It has a perfect knowledge of the systematic whole of that which faith confidently apprehends in its individual parts. The understanding calmly, and in the very abundance of assurance, arranges and rejoices in the riches of its possession as its own, as its sum of knowledge. So far as the individual truths of this knowledge are embraced for salvation, the soul exerts its Faith in full assurance; so far as they belong to a reserved future, it exerts its hope in full assurance also; but so far as they are independent altogether of present and future, and are the possession of the mind and not of the experience, the soul delivers them to the care of the understanding

which treasures them as its best and most assured knowledge.

All the varieties of Christian knowledge which the understanding deals with are gathered up by St. Paul into the unity of one object for the contemplation of the spiritual mind, which is the reason, enlightened by the Holy Ghost and brought face to face with that object, the Mystery of God in Christ. Concerning this adorable Mystery there are some things of profound importance here taught.

It is the mystery of God which is Christ. This being most probably the precise sentence which St. Paul wrote, we are taught by him that the Person of Christ, in whom God is man, and man is God, is the central and all-comprehending mystery. Here, undoubtedly, the word "mystery" must have more than its current Scriptural meaning: the secret of Christ's Person, as it has been expounded in the preceding chapter, is impenetrable to human intellect. It is a mystery, concerning which the Apostle does not say that it shall be revealed. It is the mystery of God; His, and He alone can understand it. It is the profoundest exhibition of God the Holy Trinity, that one of the sacred Persons should show forth to mortals the "fulness of the Godhead bodily!"

But it is shown forth, and in such a manner that we may have a full and distinct knowledge—for this is St. Paul's word, not acknowledgment—of this mystery. There is a difference between the penetrating a mystery, and the beholding and knowing it. We are here taught that in the richness of its full assurance, the understanding collects all the elements that go to the conception of the Divine-human Person, and unites them in one supreme object of Knowledge. The object is Christ, who is one in the unity of His person, work, and relations to man; in fact, the sum and substance of all religious truth. The knowledge is absolute, clear, and unqualified. It is more than the

logical understanding could ever reach; it is the revelation of the things of Christ directly to the mind by the Holy Ghost. And this is knowledge, certitude, assurance.

Yet this one object of knowledge, the Christ of God, contains all other objects. In this mystery, in Christ Himself, "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." To the riches of the full assurance correspond the riches of the truths of which it is assured. But it is an implicit assurance; for they are hidden in Christ. Not, of course, that they are absolutely concealed; from age to age those treasures of mystery are communicated to the Church, and become its familiar knowledge. Indeed, it is obvious that the Apostle is thinking rather of the revelation of these treasures than of their concealment. They are treasures of wisdom and knowledge; not of contemplation alone, which they might be as mere knowledge, but of practical use also, as the wisdom that guides the whole nature of redeemed man. Hence the emphasis upon "all the treasures." It is as if St. Paul would say that there is no individual knowledge, and no general wisdom, worthy of the name, which is not in and through and from Christ. All other intellectual treasures of the race, however valuable and beautiful and useful in themselves, are of phenomena and of time, and must pass away. If the vast fabric of things be destroyed or reconstructed, all extant science physical becomes at once obsolete. But the knowledge of Christ is always becoming richer. Earthly wisdom must decrease, heavenly wisdom must increase. As the individual man grows daily in that knowledge, so also does the Church behold more and more the developments of "the manifold wisdom of God" in Christ; and the world itself is silently and surely becoming more and more the sphere of the manifestation of Christ's truth.

Lastly, we are leaving the Prayer itself when we point to the Apostle's reason for the urgency of his petition. His deep desire was to defend the Colossians from their

special danger, that of listening to "oppositions of science and philosophy falsely so called." Errors which afterwards assumed forms known as Gnosticism had begun to becloud the doctrine of the incarnation, and of the relation of God in Christ to the universe. The full assurance of understanding in the mystery of Christ would be their effectual safeguard. The mind, once raised to this region of cloudless certitude, would not easily be seduced to descend into the region of scepticism, where doubt chases doubt in never-ceasing restlessness of caprice. Gnosticism, under other names, is still darkening the counsel of the Hypostatic Union of the Redeemer's natures in One Person. False philosophy and contradictory science change their forms of attack, but their essential spirit is always the same, and the defence of the Christian man, and of the Christian minister, is now, as it ever has been, to seek and to find and to keep, in the unity of the faith and in the bond of love, that serene assurance of the understanding which fills the mind with the highest wisdom, and leaves all hesitation and every shadow of doubt far behind it. That students of this adorable mystery shall ever be able to find a formula of the doctrine of the Undivided and Indivisible Christ, which shall divest it of its peculiar and inexplicable difficulties, the Apostle does not promise. Modern "theological science" promises itself this achievement; but it has no sanction for its ambition here. Moreover, that Christians may live with Christ in the "heavenly places," where nothing belonging to Him is uncertain, seems hardly credible when we look around us on the disputing Church. But it is the clear teaching, and the sure promise, of this Apostolic Prayer.

XII.

THE GLORY OF THE INHERITANCE.

"Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come."—EPHESIANS i. 15—21.

THE Epistle to the Ephesians is, more than any of the others, written in devotional language. It begins with a long doxology, which glorifies the Father of Jesus Christ for the predestined eternal sonship of His saints, for the bestowal of grace upon them in the Eternal Son of His love, and for the dispensation of the fulness of times which brought the accomplishment of redemption. Thus while "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" receives Eph. i. 3.
the tribute, the "Beloved," in whom the decree was eternal, and the "Spirit of Promise, the Holy One, who is Eph. i. 13.
the earnest of that inheritance," complete the Trinity of the mediatorial economy. The grace which was bestowed freely in the eternally beloved Son is in the first mention of it described as the "glory of His grace," whereby the Eph. i. 6.
redeeming work is connected with the supreme Divine attributes. This "glory" recurs again and again in the prayer which we have before us. The same is true of the

"inheritance," which is twofold: first, it is God's portion,
Eph. i. 11. "in whom we became His inheritance," or that "purchased
Eph. i. 14. possession" which is hereafter to be redeemed; then it is
Eph i. 14. "our inheritance," of which the Holy Spirit is the earnest. In the prayer that follows it will appear that both senses of the word are retained: God's inheritance in us and ours in Him are profoundly and internally related and one in Christ.

The doxology can hardly be said to end until verse 14; and even then it ends only to begin again in the thanksgiving which the Apostle ceased not to present, but which passed immediately into prayer, that they might experimentally know the glory of the Christian inheritance. The petitions offered on their behalf, and in behalf of the whole Church, cannot be understood without some reference to the state of those who are thus prayed for. They are first spoken of as Gentiles introduced to the common hope which had been revealed to the ancient people who "first trusted in the Christ:" that this is the allusion of the Apostle seems evident from the tenour of the Epistle and from the force of the word "before;" but it is equally obvious that the allusion is a very covert one, and too faint to be pressed. The emphasis of the thanksgiving falls, not upon the extension of grace to the Gentiles, but upon their
Eph. i. 15. "faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all saints," that is, if the words are strictly rendered, the faith belonging to them as a people now found in Christ is acknowledged, and the fruits of it in brotherly love. Going back to the preceding words, we must interpret the "wherefore" as resuming the beautiful description of Christian privilege which the Ephesians had attained. This moves in a series of pairs. They heard the "word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation:" truth as from Christ and salvation as for them. They believed, and in believing, were sealed: faith and its assurance are here united, as also faith towards Christ and sealing of God for Himself. Then the seal

becomes an "earnest of our inheritance" until the Lord redeems His own "purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory." The Christian inheritance in God and God's inheritance in the Christian are one, though the term is different in the two cases for the sake of propriety.

Thus we are introduced to the Prayer, which must be viewed in its one leading idea, the revelation to experimental knowledge of the glory of the Christian inheritance. This divides into two parts: the Father is invoked, through the Son, for the Spirit of revelation to enlighten the eyes; and the effect is described as the perception of the hope of our calling, or the riches of the inheritance generally, and particularly the personal experience of it through faith, which apprehends the might of the exalted power of the risen Saviour. There is, however, a certain unity in this prayer which renders close analysis impossible or superfluous.

The invocation introduces the Holy Trinity; and this must be remembered in the interpretation of the terms employed by the Apostle. With this key in our hands—which must be used throughout the Epistle, and especially in its prayers—we have "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory," addressed as the Giver of all knowledge; "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation" is then asked for us, both the gift and the medium of it; and "our Lord Jesus Christ" is the sphere of that knowledge, the full "knowledge of Him" being the revelation of the Triune God.

The title by which the Head of the mediatorial Trinity is addressed has no parallel elsewhere. He is the God of our incarnate Lord, both Divine and human; but His God in a relation derived from His human nature. Let not this, however, be supposed to mean that He is the God of Jesus Christ as the Being whom He worships, and to whom He prays: He is the God of whom Jesus and Jesus alone bears witness, the God whose definition is that He is

revealed in His incarnate Son. He is the Father of glory, as the eternal Father of our Lord, in a relation derived from His Divine nature. Though "glory" does not mean precisely the Divine essence as in the Son, it approaches very near that meaning. St. John says, "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father;" and St. Paul: "Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord." The ancient glory of the Shekinah was the symbol of the Divine residence in humanity through the incarnation of the Son; and now the symbol has become a reality: in one sense the "God of glory" has become "the Lord of glory;" that is, in Christ: in another sense, "the God of glory" has become "the Father of glory," inasmuch as all His glory is enshrined in the Son. Thus the two designations are only one under two aspects. It is the God revealed in Christ who is addressed, not, as we might have expected, "the God of glory" and "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ;" but inverting the order, and thus laying a stumbling-block before superficial exposition, while giving to faith an adorable mystery.

John i. 14.

Acts vii. 2.
1 Cor ii. 8.

"The Spirit of wisdom and revelation" is the special burden of the prayer; and is introduced in such a manner as to define that Spirit in His personality as the Giver of revelation objectively and the source of wisdom subjectively. Immediately before, the Apostle had said that the Holy Spirit was the seal of their consecration in the temple of God, and that as a Person: "Who is the earnest." When, therefore, the supplication asks conditionally that the Father "may give unto you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation," it is obvious that the emphasis lies on a specific influence of the Holy Ghost, already indwelling in the heart. What the precise blessings are, which we are taught to expect, will appear from a combination of the three terms: wisdom, revelation, and knowledge of God. Their combination: the arrangement of the two former words in the original shows that they were most closely

united in the Apostle's thought, while both have their further explanation in the third.

The Spirit is in every believer a revealing Agent, unveiling or showing the things of Christ. In the Church generally, He executed that office once for all as the Spirit of inspiration, revealing the mind of God through the Scriptures; and continually executes it by interpreting those Scriptures to the common mind and heart of the people of God, who "have an unction from the Holy One, and know all things." But it is evident that the Apostle invokes that Spirit here as the Revealer of truth to the individual Christian; and as this is the strongest and clearest instance of the mention of such a privilege, it must be riveted on our minds. The Holy Ghost dwelling in the believer may be to him a perpetual internal oracle; "the word of Christ" dwelling in him "richly;" that is, the very voice of the Word secretly teaching him what he could not otherwise know. For we must not lose here the proper meaning of the term revelation: it is more than the mere direction of the understanding in the meditation of truth; it is no less than the secret disclosure to the contemplation of truth concerning Christ which is not written in words. Unless this be so, revelation is no more revelation. The logical understanding may weave into systematic doctrine the Scriptural teaching concerning the Person and work of the Mediator. But that is not all, nor is that enough. It is the privilege of every believer to have the anointing from the Holy One, which makes Him a personal Saviour revealed over again to the heart. The same Spirit who presides over what must be called the external revelation of the Christ, presides also over what may be called the internal revelation to each. Nothing less than this will satisfy the language of our prayer; nothing less than this should satisfy the aspiration of the Christian. It is true that he has already, by the very terms of his discipleship, received already such an internal manifestation of the

1 John ii. 20.

Col. iii. 16.

Saviour. He has already "trusted in Christ," and his union with the Lord has been already "sealed." He has received an internal assurance of acceptance which no theoretical belief could bring him; he has beheld the Lord by a light not kindled by human agency. But he has before him a glorious future of revelations; according to
John. i. 50. that word, "Thou shalt see greater things than these."
John xiv. 21. There remains yet the fulfilment of the great promise: "I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him." And it is concerning that unlimited future of new and ever-deepening discoveries of the "mystery of God and of Christ" that the Apostle here prays in this once uttered petition for "the Spirit of revelation."

Though the "wisdom" precedes in the text, it follows in the experience. The truths concerning Christ, which are revealed to "the eyes of the heart," become wisdom when they are applied to the practical conduct of the life. Though there are some passages which seem to wrap up in this word the result of the whole prophetic office of the
1 Cor. i. 30. Christ, "who is made unto us Wisdom," yet a careful consideration will show that it is always the wisdom that shapes the human conduct on earth according to the principles of the Divine teaching from heaven. The Spirit who condescends to impress the truth on the mind of the inner man, revealing, that is, unveiling the Saviour to the interior eye, itself unveiled, is "the Spirit of wisdom," inasmuch as He condescends to be the interior Monitor of the spirit in all the varieties of its earthly probation. It is that wisdom which dwells with prudence, in an earlier
Eph. i. 8. passage: the grace which He made to "abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence." The interior Guide reveals by special illapses the specific privileges and specific duties of the Christian life; He also indicates the action which these privileges and duties require; and He becomes the source of a permanent character of wisdom in the Christian walk. No error of exposition is more diligently to be

guarded against than that which would limit this prayer to the special and transitory endowments of the age of charisms or "gifts;" as if the Apostle were asking for extraordinary visitations of the Holy Ghost to eke out the deficiencies of a canonical Scripture not yet complete. Let every reader of these words stedfastly believe that all the blessedness of direct revelation from on high and infallible directory for the life below is his own inalienable privilege. But we need not prove this, in the face of the words that now follow; for these words find their unity and perfection in "the perfect knowledge of Him." And this must be regarded as introducing the second and remaining Person in the mediatorial Trinity. It cannot indeed be proved that the "knowledge of Him" is the knowledge of Christ specifically. It cannot indeed be disproved; but the discussion of this point is superfluous. The very term "full or perfect knowledge" itself indicates that the knowledge meant is that of the supreme God as revealed in the person of the Incarnate Son. Other knowledge of God, it may be boldly said, is "gnosis;" the knowledge of God in Christ is that "epignosis" which is here spoken of. Here may be applied St. Paul's similar distinction elsewhere: "Now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." All knowledge of God out of Christ is sound and good so far as it goes; but it is only "in part." And this shows us the propriety of the prayer. It asks that the Spirit may give to every believer that full spiritual apprehension of God, in His evangelical relations to us in Christ, which are the end, and sum, and glory of all revelation. "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father."

1 Cor. xiii. 12.

Jno. xiv 9.

This answers the question whether "of Him" refers to God or to Christ: it refers to both, but primarily to Christ. Moreover, "in the knowledge of Him" means, according to this interpretation, more than "in order to knowing Him." The design of the revelation comes after-

wards: this is the revelation itself. The knowledge of Christ is the substance of all the Spirit's teaching. He has no other subject to unfold; nothing else to show: whatsoever is not related to the Lord, in whom the Father is, cannot be called knowledge. "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." The life which is "hid with Christ in God" is simply and purely the knowledge of God in Christ. And, in proportion as that life deepens, it determines, as it were, to know nothing among men but "Christ, and Him crucified;" nothing besides, unless it be indeed the same exalted Christ, "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." There is no comparison here between this knowledge and other knowledge: true knowledge, "epignosis," is one and of One; all else is opinion, speculation, observation of phenomena, the fleeting thought concerning the fleeting objects that perish in the knowing. The sure and unfailing effect of the entire surrender of the spirit to this interior Teacher, is the setting the thought on "things above, where Christ is." The spirit proper, as distinguished from the soul, becomes sanctified to one only thought. Leaving to the lower faculties such knowledge as is limited to time, it is conversant only with One: "The mystery of God and of Christ" absorbs all, empties that inmost shrine of all memories, thoughts, imaginations, and almost of all images, that it may be filled with the knowledge of the supreme Essence.

John xvii. 3.

Col. iii. 3.

Col. iii. 2.

Hence, to sum up what has been said up to this point: the prayer is addressed to the Father as the Head of the mediatorial Trinity, the God whom Christ reveals and the Father whose Divine glory is revealed in Christ, that He would grant to us the full and perfect knowledge of Himself as He is known only in the Son, through the Holy Spirit, who, sealing and consecrating all believers to God in the Divine temple, is to each an internal Revealer of the things of Christ in their manifold applications to the life of

practical wisdom. Among all the appeals to heaven which the Apostle suggests to us, there is none more glorious, none more important, than this. But to feel its glory and its importance we must open our hearts to that rich interpretation of the words which the Apostle himself gives.

First, we have the link between the interior Spirit of revelation and the specific results of His indwelling: it is "the eyes of your heart enlightened, that ye may know." The two branches of this clause must be taken together: the illumination of the eyes of the inner man renders him capable of spiritually discerning more and more of the blessedness of the Christian's privilege. And that privilege is exhibited in a threefold progression; the peculiarity of the clauses being that each refers both to God and to ourselves, and that each rises above its predecessor in fulness and strength. We have God's calling and our hope; God's inheritance in us the saints; God's great power in Christ to us who believe. We have the thrice-repeated "what," but in striking progression: first the simple "hope," then "the riches of the glory of His inheritance," then "the exceeding greatness of His power, according to the working of the force of His might, as He wrought in Christ," and so on to infinity. This last word is literally true. The prayer goes off into infinite space and infinite power, and is simply lost amidst the glories of the heavenly places. Whilst we read we are reminded of the writer's words elsewhere: "O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged." It requires a large heart to receive such words: "Be ye also enlarged." It requires much boldness to expound them. But the task will be lightened if we remember that the prayer, strictly speaking, ends at the point where the Saviour's resurrection is exhibited as the standard of the power of God in the life of the saints. The glory of His authority after the ascension is thrown back upon the petitions, but is nevertheless beyond them.

2 Cor. vi. 11—13.

"The eyes of your heart being enlightened." The heart

and not the understanding: the understanding is of the soul in alliance with its bodily organ, the brain; but the heart is the bodiless inner man, and has its eyes, which are waiting for the illumination of the light which comes from no earthly sun. Not waiting for the first springing of that light; it has already been shed upon the soul by Him who is the light of life. The form of the word in the original shows that the Apostle is speaking of a continuous state of enlightenment, kept up and increasing through the constant shining of the Holy Ghost, whether through the word or without the word. And this shining of a clear, steady, unflickering light within both prepares the spiritual organ to discern and furnishes the medium through which are to be discerned all higher truths. The light is not the truth; nor is it the experience of the truth. It is only the preparation for it, or its medium: the blessed operation of the Holy Ghost on the spiritual vision which enables it to perceive more and more clearly the forms and realities of Divine things; or, in other words, spiritually to discern them. It is the eye of the heart which is enlightened, but it is enlightened to "know:" to know, that is, by experience; for, though the heart means the centre of the personality of the inner man, and not the centre of his sensibilities only, it must be remembered that the sensibilities cannot be excluded from the word. It always connotes both spiritual perception and spiritual life. The inner man, under the discipline and education of the Holy Ghost, is never pure intellect, never pure feeling, never pure will; but the unity of these three, in which neither of the elements can be supposed to be wanting. It is the man who is enlightened both from within and from without; as our Lord says, "He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life:" light from the Spirit within and light from Me without. Or, in other words more appropriate to the present subject: "If thy whole body therefore be full of light, having no part

John viii. 12.

Luke xi. 36.

dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light." The shining within, which disperses all darkness from every corner, makes the whole external world full of light.

Here then we have the light of knowledge and the light of practical life combined: thus corresponding with "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation." The two are never disjoined in Divine things. They are closely connected throughout this Epistle, which abounds in references to the double illumination that leaves no part dark within or without. To the contemplative eye is presented the grandest assemblage of objects that man's spirit may ever see; and to the practical eye the way is lighted up to the sure possession of all that contemplation gives to life. Allusion has been made to the three pairs of counterparts in the sequel of the prayer: to the former, those which refer to the objective privileges as they are provided by God, corresponds the contemplation of spiritual discernment; to the latter, those which refer to the subjective possession of them, corresponds the practical or experimental light that makes them our own.

The vocation of Christians through the word of the Gospel is twofold: it is to the enjoyment of a personal salvation from sin and the condemnation of the world; and it is to the future blessedness of religion, springing out of every present moment, filling the whole course of time, and expanding into eternity. The former privilege of the Christian calling it was not necessary that the Apostle should pray for: the Ephesians had trusted in Christ and been sealed as the inheritance of God. The first great enlightening of their eyes had taken place: they had passed from darkness to light. But "the hope of His calling" was still unknown; and to be known only by their enlarging experience. Hence it is not "your calling," but "His calling:" a significant change of the accustomed phraseology. The amazing blessings to which believers

are called—invited, that is, rather than ordained—are "hid with Christ in God," hid in the same boundless and unknown treasury as that in which are concealed "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." This will sufficiently answer the question sometimes raised, as to the nature of the hope of our prayer: whether it is the knowledge of the objective and external hope, or the experience of the subjective and internal expectation that the Apostle prays for. It is obvious that the two must be combined in such a prayer as this. The enlightened eyes of the heart can know the object of hope only by the experience of the hope itself. As the thing expected is made a possession, and desire passes into fruition, we come to know what to this extent is the hope of His calling, who unfolds only by degrees the mysteries of the Christian vocation. So far, however, as knowledge means experience, this object of knowledge is one: the blessing hoped for and enjoyed proves the blessedness of the hope itself. The Scriptural definition of our inmost personality by the word "heart" contains an indication of this: it is the personality as the personality of one who feels. A very strict exposition of these words must admit that "the hope of His calling," as known by the enlightened eyes, must mean the treasury of blessings to which in time and in eternity God calls His people: the Apostle prays that we may be taught to appreciate rightly the dignity and blessedness of the Gospel vocation. By adding the word "appreciate" we bring out what is after all the secret of the petition. Here we borrow the "riches" of the next clause. Hope is the expectation of desire; and its high prerogative as a Christian grace is that it has literally an unlimited range for its expatiation. To know the hope of His calling is simply to know, and to rejoice in knowing, that it passeth knowledge. Whatever faith in the Gospel now brings is only the germ of an endless development. The best that is given to faith is only an "earnest;" and the best riches of religion are its

hope. This will not be true throughout eternity; but it is most certainly true in time.

As a kind of link between this clause and the next, it may be noted that there is the closest possible connection between the enlightening of the eyes of the heart and the knowledge of the treasures in the possession of hope. "That ye may know" really means, "in your knowing." It is not that a faculty is given or stimulated to render us capable of estimating aright the infinite superiority of the Gospel hope to all other riches which the soul may desire. This is included; but there is more than this. The lighting up of the inward vision is the experience itself; it is that knowledge which is life eternal. Sometimes, indeed, the objects of hope are remitted onward to the future state. But this prayer contains no direct reference to the future state as separated by a great gulf from the present. The hope it exults in is under a law of continuity which allows no break. It makes the illimitable future grow moment by moment out of the present, and so shine onward to the perfect day. But it is plain that here we already expound the words that follow, which by a wonderful cumulation, such as our Apostle often uses, to try, as it were, the utmost resources of human words, sets forth the glorious riches of the inheritance which is mutual between God and His saints in Christ.

But "glorious riches" is by no means sufficient: this will appear if we take the words in their inverted order, as, indeed, we must take them, if we would know their meaning.

Nothing will exhaust the fulness of the term inheritance here but that interpretation which makes it mutual, as God's purchased possession in His saints and their possession of Him, the only portion of the soul. For this we have been prepared by the earlier testimony, that in Christ "we were also made His inheritance." Regenerate and sanctified mankind is and will be for ever the full realisa-

tion of the typical portion which God had in Israel, concerning whom it was said that they were a people whom
Deut. iv. 20. Jehovah "chose for His inheritance." His children "predestinated in Christ to the adoption of sons" are His portion in the human race. Many of the most affecting sayings of the New Testament both illustrate and are illustrated by this truth. As to the Son incarnate, it is not more true that His saints partake of Christ than that He finds His rest, and joy, and satisfaction in them. They are purified unto Himself for a peculiar people; and they will be, when their number is complete, the fulness which makes up the sum or complement of His being as He is the Christ. As they are complete or fulfilled in Him, so is He complete or fulfilled in them; as the original of St. Paul's words to the Colossians shows. Although the sacred dignity of Scripture does not positively condescend to say so, yet the words sometimes all but declare that His sanctified people are the heritage which He receiveth from the Father.
Jno. xvii. 24. "All Thine are Mine." "I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me." But if the saints are the portion of Christ, the Son, "All Mine are Thine!" and the Father receives as His "portion" what the Son receives as the "lot of His inheritance." And the Holy Ghost inhabits the saints as His own temple and body. Thus we come back to the words which we have already seen to testify all this in another form. The Holy Ghost is "the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession;" the earnest in profound reality, both to the saints and to the Triune God of the saints.

The "glory of His inheritance in the saints" does not therefore mean the glory of heaven to which the saints are called; but the present manifestation of the glory of grace in believers who are gradually "perfected into one" through their union with the Redeemer. Our Lord in His final prayer has taught us to understand what the Divine glory in the saints is: a glory which is spiritual. not seen nor

known of men, not of the similitude of what is generally counted glory, but the shining forth of the Divine holiness mystically in the Church. Hence St. Paul tells us that we "beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory." To see, or to behold, or to apprehend that glory in the Church, the eyes of the heart must be enlightened. The world does not behold it; it is but dimly apprehended even by many who are no longer of the world; but to those who are spiritually taught the presence of the Triune God in the sanctuary of His spiritual temple is the presence of a Divine glory. To them the heavens do not more certainly declare the glory of God, the sun does not more certainly light up with glory the physical creation, than the Divine indwelling glorifies the mystical Church of His inheritance. And the believer, who looks upon the interior transformation of his own soul, knows, though his humility shrinks from avowing it, that his own "light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon" him.

2 Cor. iii. 18.

Isaiah lx. 1.

But if the term "glory" refers rather to the Divine indwelling in the saints His inheritance, the term "riches" refers specially to the experience of the saints themselves, who already possess, as surely, though not so abundantly, as they ever will, God as their everlasting portion. Here let us once more go back to the earlier part of the Epistle, and observe that "the riches of His grace" have been spoken of as abounding towards us. Nor shall we be content with the customary distinction between grace and glory, making the former the heritage of time, and the latter the privilege of eternity. By no means. That distinction between grace and glory is nowhere expressly laid down in Scripture, though it is now and then indicated, and is in some sense a necessary distinction. Certainly in this Epistle, and in our present Prayer, there is no such demarcation. The "riches of grace" are displayed towards us in our "redemption through His blood,

the forgiveness of our sins;" the "riches of His glory" concurrently and most certainly in the positive enjoyments for which deliverance and forgiveness were only the preparations. Whilst both the negative and the positive blessings redound alike "to the praise of His glory," the former unfold rather the riches of His grace, the latter the riches of His glory. What the present estate of our humiliation is to the future manifestation of the sons of God in glory, that the lower blessings of the grace of deliverance are to the higher blessings of fellowship and union with God.

Here is the secret of the difference among Christians as to the endowments of religion. Some know and some do not know the riches of the glory of His inheritance. But that difference is not in the intention of God, the supreme Dispenser of these treasures. He as freely offers to us all the highest glory of His grace as He offers its first experience of pardon. But the eyes of the greater part are long holden. They know not how rich their inheritance is in God, because they forget that He is never the supreme Good of the soul until it has renounced all other sources of satisfaction. He is jealous of His prerogative to be the only blessedness of His people. So long as any creature, especially so long as self, the worst of all the creatures, is the source of the happiness of the spirit, so long is there a restraint on the fruition of God. Blessed are they who have the eyes of the heart enlightened to know how past all human language precious are "the riches of the glory of the inheritance OF HIM." They read the words as we have now quoted them, and are impatient of any other reading.

Once more we must remember the strict connection between the enlightened eyes of the heart and this thrice blessed heritage. The interior illumination is not a preparation to know all this in a future state. However true it may be that the present life is a gracious discipline of

the faculties of the inner man to bear the exceeding weight of glory that shall be revealed, it is not the purpose of the Apostle to intimate this in his prayer. Here we may borrow the immemorial teaching of the best and purest Mysticism, which has in this passage its text and justification. That old tradition described the way of perfection as travelling through three stages; purgation from sin and sense, illumination by secret grace, and perfect union with God. These three processes, however, were not only successive, but also simultaneous, especially the two latter. Every fresh revelation of the Lord is itself a deeper experience of union with Him, on the one hand, while, on the other, it makes sin and self more loathsome, and purifies the soul from both. But here the Lord's word in the prayer so often quoted is our best interpreter: "I will love Him, and will manifest Myself unto him." Jno. xiv. 21. The Fairest Object the eyes of the heart can ever see is Himself, and that is the object He presents to the prepared vision. But He does not manifest Himself that He may be seen in His loveliness, and then invited to enter. The manifestation of Himself to the perception, knowledge, feeling, consciousness, and mystical enjoyment of the soul is itself His entrance and His indwelling as the portion and deepest blessedness of that soul. But here again we are anticipating the last swelling clause of the prayer, which goes off into infinity.

It might seem to a superficial consideration as if the Apostle, under the strong pressure of emotion, had forgotten that he was praying for the enlightenment of their eyes, and had omitted a word that should here have been inserted: "that He may grant you to feel the exceeding greatness of His power." But here the observation already made comes a third time to our help: the inward illumination is itself the strength of the Lord in another form; and to know the might of the Divine power is only another way of expressing the hope of our calling and the glory of the

inheritance. And how impressive is this accumulation of synonymes, each giving its new tribute of force to the common meaning of the whole! The Holy Spirit alone can expound these words in that strength of their meaning which passeth language and passeth knowledge. All that we can do is to mark the order that reigns in the tumult of holy words. The Divine power follows the general hope of the calling, and the more specific glory of union with God, as being the still more specific secret of the interior transformation of our nature. That power is regarded as in God surpassing all limit, as in us limited only by faith. Having mentioned our faith as the sole and simple condition and instrument of the operation of the Divine strength, the Apostle goes on both to explain and to encourage that faith, and its high influence. His method of doing this is one that is very characteristic. He sets before us the risen and exalted Redeemer as the Head of the new Christian creation: risen, through an operation of the Divine power that knows no bounds, which Divine power, however, is continued in every one who becomes identified with Him by faith; exalted, that He might become the Source of that power which faith has at its command. It will be observed that faith is the leading word of the whole, so far as we are concerned, though it seems to come in only subordinately. It is the key placed in our hand whereby we unlock the treasury of these most holy mysteries, and enter and take possession and rejoice. But this faith also is of the secret influence of the Spirit; it is itself included in the enlightening of the eyes of the heart; for the opening of the spiritual eye is no other than the quickening of the principle of belief in the inner man into the energy of faith in God.

The terms which define the power of God for which we pray must be reduced back to their threefold gradation: "according to the working of His mighty power" is, literally, "according to the standard or proportion of the

operation in Christ and in us of the strength which is put forth from the might of the attribute of Divine omnipotence." We see and feel the "working;" but we refer that to a "strength" which is beyond the operation; and that again must be carried back to the infinite resources of the Divine "might." But these three words are used in relation to Christ, whose resurrection is regarded as the supreme exhibition of the Divine power as it is spiritual: what the springing of the universe into being is as regards physical power, the raising of Christ is as regards the spiritual power of God in the Church. The resurrection of our Head was virtually the resurrection of His people from the penalty of sin which is death: in the unfathomable mystery of the atonement, He, and we in Him, died to the condemnation of the law, and yet lived. "If One died for all, then all died." "Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more." "Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Here we do well to limit ourselves to the prayer which really stimulates our faith to apprehend the truth that the Divine operation in Christ is reproduced and continued in us. There is, for the future, the resurrection of our bodies and of our whole nature from all that belongs to physical death; and for the present, the still more wonderful resurrection of our souls from all that belongs to spiritual death. In virtue of our union with Christ, the Divine power is creating in us the exact image of all that our nature is in Him: freedom from all condemnation, and from all the defilement, weakness, and dishonour of sin. "Which thing is true in Him and in you." "To usward who believe" there is going forth a Divine power which has no restraint, save in ourselves, as it respects the destruction of our evil and the full re-establishment of the image of God. This is the standard of the Divine operation, and it must be the standard of the expectation of our faith.

2 Cor. v. 14. Rom. vi. 9—11.

1 Jno. ii. 8.

But at this point the structure of the prayer changes. "And He made Him sit in the heavenly places.....to be Head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." This seems to indicate that the Divine operation, wrought in Christ as our Representative, is, so to speak, transferred to Him as our Head, that He may accomplish in us all the will of the Divine Omnipotence. In these words our Prayer has ended. The Apostle's theology continues in a strain that always has in it the preeminence, and dilates upon the eternal relations of the exalted Lord to His Church. We must not pursue the paragraph into its details. Suffice that all the "riches of the glory" of our Lord's authority in heaven must be brought down to earth and become "the riches of His grace." To the believing Church, and to every humble member of that Church who believes, heaven and earth are one. In this sense "the resurrection is past already." His saints have risen with Christ, and sit in heavenly places with Him. As all the fulness of the Godhead dwelleth in Him bodily, so all His fulness dwelleth bodily in His Church. Between the Head and the members there is a blessed continuity: there can be no gulf fixed. "He that is joined unto the Lord is one Spirit." And it is His will that the unction of His holiness should descend to every member of His mystical body, in the very same irresistible energy whereby in the external universe "all things are put under His feet." This is the measure of the standard of the expectation of faith: a measure that reacheth even unto you, whosoever you are that read. Stedfastly believing that He now filleth all His saints with all His gifts, we may set our hope on a full salvation, on the full enjoyment of the hope of His calling, on the full inheritance of our God in our hearts, on the being "filled with the Spirit."

1 Cor. vi. 17.

Eph. v. 18.

XIII.

THE INDWELLING TRINITY.

"For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."—EPHESIANS iii. 14—21.

IN this prayer we have entered the holiest of the temple-epistle. The Apostle has shown us that in the outer court Jews and Gentiles are one, the wall of partition being removed; that the sanctuary also is one with the court of the general assembly, for the altar of the one eternal sacrifice has served its purpose and is gone; that the veil between the sanctuary and the most holy place is also removed, not only rent, but done away; and that the one temple, without any veils and distinctions, is the mystical Church of the living God. Of the perfect worship of this temple he now gives us a model. But he does not introduce it as such. He does not call upon the Ephesians to join in this high exercise. But he throws it into the most simple form of his own intercessory prayer, as if he were himself for the time the high-priest: "I bow my knees before the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . that He would grant you." We must however note, without dwelling on, St. Paul's personal relation to the prayer. "For this cause,"

resumes the same words in verse 1, where the thought was suspended. Because they, the Gentiles, were "also builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit," "an holy temple in the Lord;" and because the Apostle had this grace given to him, that he "should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;" and because in Him "we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him;" therefore he, the preacher of this revealed mystery, bowed the knees of his spirit while he wrote and led them as it were into the holiest, and thus prayed for them and with them, that, as the spiritual house of God, they might be filled with His triune fulness. If we lose sight of the petitioner's person, as he himself soon loses sight of it, the prayer resolves itself into the mediatorial approach and invocation, the Trinitarian blessings besought, and the doxology, which closes all.

The invocation is of "the Father, from whom every race in heaven and earth is named." This is all that the text contains; and it teaches us that our prayer must go up to God as the Father of spirits: the spirits of the heavenly host, and "the spirits of all flesh" on earth. But it must not be forgotten that the mediatorial access through Jesus is presupposed, as having been mentioned immediately before.

We are struck at once by the simplicity of the name "Father," irresistibly suggesting the analogy of the Lord's Prayer, after the pattern of which this central prayer of the Apostle is constructed. We have only a few instances of so simple an invocation. St. Peter indirectly uses it: "If ye call on the Father." Its direct use is found thrice. First, our Lord places it at the head of His teaching concerning prayer. He came from heaven "that He might bring us to God" and teach us to pray: His entire ministry may be defined as a revelation of the way to heaven. Now it is observable that His very first instructions bring the Supreme before us as "our Father."

By this name He had not been known to the ancients; not even the most favoured, not the most beloved, had used that word. It was reserved for the set hour that should disclose the triune mystery: thus the most unsearchable and the most gracious aspects of the Divine essence were by one and the same teaching brought near to us. Both are the result of the mediation of the Son. He alone knoweth the Father in the Trinity, He alone bringeth back the Divine Fatherhood to man. Secondly, our Lord Himself makes this invariably the address by which He approaches heaven: praying through His humanity for us men, He has but this one name, thus hallowing it for our use for ever. He uses it for Himself and for us. The third is this of our text: so striking and so unusual that it was not long permitted to remain in its simplicity. A few words which are implied were added as if of necessity.

The approach through Jesus is as obvious as if it were directly asserted: so obvious as itself to account for the ancient and venerable interpolation of the words "of our Lord Jesus Christ," "in whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him:" confidence to approach and boldness to call Him Father. "Through Him we both," Jews and Gentiles, "have access by one Spirit unto the Father." Our adoption is our union with the Eternal Son made flesh, and its first fruit is that we may call His Father our Father; and this special privilege is always connected with His mediation under this specific aspect: not so much because He is the mediatorial Redeemer in the atonement, or the mediatorial High Priest in Heaven, as because as He is the incarnate mediatorial Son. As we are guilty creatures, He is between us and God the Reconciler; as we are separated from God by defilement, He is between Eternal Holiness and us, the High Priest with the blood of cleansing. But, as we are children who have wandered, He represents us

Eph. iii. 12.

Eph. ii. 18.

to the Father in His filial nature united with ours. In this last sense He will be the Mediator for ever. "In the Beloved" we shall be children of God throughout eternity. In the present life it is the one ground of our approach: whether expressly recognised or not, always assumed. This great prayer of the Apostle's, like our Lord's, makes no direct allusion to our access in Christ.

But while the highest and most precious privilege of Christian prayer is to call upon the Father by the Spirit of adoption in the unity of the Incarnate Son, and this privilege is the singular prerogative of the brethren of this Elder Brother, there is a sense in which we share it with other races and families upon whom the Fatherly name of God "is named." Although, on the one hand, this appeal to heaven is the most limited of all appeals, on the other hand it is one of the most catholic. The Fatherhood of God is named upon races or families of heaven, of which we as yet know little: not races or families in the human meaning, but rather in that of orders of created intelligences, brought into being individually, so far as we know, each after his kind. These in multitudes and varieties past all human estimate call God Father, in virtue of their original birthright; and our restoration to the vast family circle through the mediation of Christ is said in this Epistle, and that to the Colossians, to be "the reconciliation of things in heaven and things in earth" to God and to each other. We with them shall call upon and worship the Father for ever, and all alike through the mediation of the Son: we through His redeeming mediation as that of the Son Incarnate, they through the same Eternal Son, as the Firstborn before every creature, by whom and in whom "all thing were created," the supreme Intermediary between the Three-One essential Being and all created intelligences. Nor, in this catholic invocation, must we omit the tribes and families of earth, all of whom are in a most real and impressive sense the sons of God:

Eph. iii. 6.

not losing that name even in the farthest "far country," though losing its best privileges. The fact that our Lord is the Son of God in humanity must always forbid the thought that any of the children of men are dealt with otherwise than as children. There is a measure of truth in the ancient interpretation implied in the added clause, "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of Whom:" at least, so far as earth is concerned. Most certainly the Creator would have had no children on earth, would never have owned such a genealogical tree as that which His name heads in St. Luke, had not Christ entered the race. We know no filial relation that is not of grace through Christ. But such a filial relation cannot be denied to the most degraded sinner while probation lasts; when that ceases, and not till then, the Son of God becomes a "son of perdition:" his perdition being mainly the loss of the prerogatives of that name.

When we proceed to the petitions themselves, we are at once arrested by the Trinitarian character they assume. The Father is addressed as the sovereign Dispenser of the riches of the glory of His grace, as the Giver of the influences of the Spirit and of the life of the Indwelling Son. The Holy Ghost is the strength of the inner man of the regenerate. The Son is their hidden life. And the issue of the individual enjoyment of the special gifts of the individual Persons of the Trinity is the filling of the whole Church unto "all the fulness of God;" that is, the growth of the whole body into its perfection as "the fulness of Him who filleth all in all."

To the Father in the mediatorial Trinity is assigned the sovereign dispensation of the gifts of grace. Here it is not the Son, but the Father, who "in all things" has "the preeminence;" the preeminence, that is, as the primal Author and Source of what is called the counsel of redemption, "the purpose" or will of the opening words of our Epistle. Of this our Lord Himself gave us the plain

John xiv. 28. and sufficient text when He said above, "My Father is greater than I," words which have meaning for us only when they are regarded as combining two truths, seemingly contradictory, but eternally harmonious: an essential equality in the Divine essence, a mediatorial distinction in the economy of redemption. Of all imaginable things none could be more superfluous than for a creaturely son to say, "My Father is greater than I." But nothing was more necessary to future Christian theology than that our Lord should give the original testimony that the subordination of the two Persons to the First, through the incarnation and its issues, was fundamental. This word is the justification of the consistent teaching of the Epistles: not only of occasional passages, but of their entire strain, which makes the Father the Head of the mediatorial Trinity and of the work of redemption, in which the Trinity is one. God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, as in the beginning of this Epistle; and the Father is also that God

1 Cor. xi. 3. who is "the Head of Christ." "Of Him are all things," and to Him all prayer is supremely directed; "through Him are all things," for the mediatorial economy in His purpose and will accomplished; and "for Him are all things," as the "God of glory" in redemption, to whom therefore the final doxology is presented. It must be remembered that there is an absolute Trinity behind the mediatorial, and that in the unity of the Three-One both prayer and praise are offered to the Three Persons in the work of human salvation. But in this Epistle we have only the formal mediatorial order of devotion. The Son is only the Mediator of access. By one Spirit we approach:

Eph. v. 17. Eph. vi. 18. with our praises, "Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms;" with our prayers, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit."

We must be equally careful in our interpretation of the clauses which introduce and discriminate the threefold procession of the grant which reveals the Holy Trinity

in the body of believers. Thrice is the purpose of the prayer expressly mentioned, the purpose, however, being so stated as to be really the object of the petitions also. The first has reference to the individual believer, the second to both the individual and the Body, the third pre-eminently to the Body alone.

And, first, the Spirit is "His Spirit," the Spirit of God the Father, sent from Him through the intercession of the Son. Here it is needful to observe that reference is made to an abiding influence of the Spirit on the inner man of the Christian, who has already received that Spirit under two aspects, as the Spirit of the Son in adoption, and as the Earnest of an always future inheritance. The Holy Ghost is once for all given in both these latter senses: it is the believer's privilege, as a believer, to have the abiding access to God, and hope of future salvation. But the continuous and ever-increasing strength of the Holy Ghost is granted by degrees, and the measure of these degrees makes the difference between one Christian and another. As there is a growth into the fulness of God, and a gradual establishment into permanence of the indwelling of Christ, so there is a progression in the inward operation of the Spirit. That progression is very clearly marked in our Epistle. In the first chapter all believers are sealed by the Spirit as the earnest of God's possession and their inheritance; in this prayer the ever-increasing might of the Spirit is presented as a promise; and towards the close we are all exhorted to "be filled with the Spirit." Here, therefore, we have the correction of three prevalent errors. The gift of the Spirit is the common possession of believers: there is no higher or better dispensation marked by His descent upon those who had believed in Jesus only. That gift admits of a boundless variety of degrees in those who are true believers. It may reach the measure of such a perfection that the whole being shall be filled with His power.

Secondly, it is observable that the prayer is for the Spirit's might into "the inner man;" which opens up to us the blessed mystery of the progressive renewal of our own nature through the growth within us of the new man in which Christ dwells. The precision of the New Testament on this subject demands that we make its own distinction here. The inner man, and the new man, and Christ within us, are not definitions of one and the same thing. The inner man is the true personality for which neither science nor religion has any other name: the interior man in the sphere of his moral conscience or consciousness; "the hidden man of the heart," whose heart, however, or conscience may be darkened almost to a total exclusion of the light of Divine things from the nature. When that inner man is reached by the energy of the Divine Spirit, and the influences of convincing grace deepen into regeneration, the inner man becomes the "new man," as distinguished from a former state. This work is the prerogative of the Holy Ghost, who, however, forms the image of Christ in the soul, and so intimately unites it to the Lord that His indwelling is "Christ in us." But it must be remembered that this third term is generally reserved, as in this prayer, for the high privilege of the growing believer. Christ, indeed, is in every Christian, unless he be "reprobate;" but the dwelling of Christ in the heart by faith is the higher expression which we shall have presently to consider. Meanwhile, the subject of petition here is the strengthening grace of the Holy Ghost, directed "towards" the secret springs of action in the interior man. It is as it were the Eternal Spirit, from whom all spiritual existence "in heaven and earth is named," seeking His own in the nature of man: the Great Restorer of the defaced Image, creating anew, but by using again the dishonoured materials of His first handiwork, breathing again upon what He once inbreathed, and recalling to their original vocation the energies of man's soul.

Cor. xiii 5.

He restores the freedom of the will, though only to give it the liberty of freely following His suggestion. He revives in the reason the remembrance of truth long forgotten; He lights up in the desires the one supreme affection. In short, He saves the soul through its own faculties; and, from first to last, His strength is made perfect in the weakness of our inner man.

As to our adorable Lord, the great prayer takes two forms: one referring back to what precedes, the indwelling of Christ through the Spirit; the other referring to what follows, the knowledge of the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ which leads to the fulness of God.

The connection between the clauses is very strict in the original: the strengthening of the inner man, which is the renewal of our original nature, is no other than the perpetual invigoration of that faith by which the Christ, the Second Man, dwells in the heart as the new man of our regeneration. As to the former, the believer may say, "Nevertheless I live;" as to the latter, he must add, "Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me:" "the inner man" and the "new man" become one through the sacred indwelling of Him "who is our Life." The faith here spoken of is the faith of the inner man quickened through Divine operation, and for ever apprehending, embracing, and keeping in the heart the Lord Jesus. Whereas in us, that is, in our flesh, "dwelleth no good thing;" in us, in our new nature, Christ "dwelleth," or takes up His fixed and permanent abode. The connection indicated above is established in the Epistle to the Romans: "But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His. And if Christ be in you..." The indwelling of His Spirit is the indwelling of Christ, and makes the soul "His:" His in the most blessed and indescribable sense: His to dwell in as His rest, as His body, as His temple, in short, as His abode and His home. This is a blessing prayed for as

Gal. ii. 20.

Col. iii. 4.

Rom. viii. 9, 10.

dependent on the Spirit's ceaseless energy; and the emphatic word "dwell" here—the strongest form of the expression, in fact, the same which is used of the Son: "It
Col. i. 19. pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell;"
Col. ii. 9. "for in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily,"—plainly means such a fixed and abiding establishment of the Dread Presence in the heart as transforms the soul into Him. Within and below this a multitude of other illustrations crowd. The indwelling Lord dwells
Col. iii. 16. richly, as a living word within us; as the Supreme internal authority ruling the life; as the hope of glory; as the abiding principle of life and sanctification. But the words of our prayer go beyond all these. They are a significant expansion, and as it were transformation, of the thought that our "inner man" is strengthened. That inner man becomes now a new man, which is only the organ and instrument of the indwelling Christ, who lives over again in the believer's soul, executing there His three offices as "the Christ:" teaching, ruling, and sanctifying the spirit that is one with Him as He is one with it.

There can be no doubt that the change in the next clause directs us to the effect upon our character of that sacred indwelling of the Lord: were the words "rooted and grounded" absent, it would be otherwise. The thought would then flow on into a prayer that the soul, conscious of so blessed a Guest, might experience—that is, perceive with the mind and feel with the heart — the endless kindness of the love of Christ. This would be in strict
John xiv. 23. keeping with the Lord's own sacred promise: "And My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him." Hence we may dare to pray for this: for the constant perception of the flow of the Saviour's tokens of love in the soul. What these tokens are can be known only by experience; just as we can know only by experience what that companion

word meant, "I will manifest Myself to him." How rich and clear that manifestation is no exposition can tell: it is a revelation that the eye of the heart must be enlightened to see. It was the word by which our Lord when about to depart from the sensible observation of His own promised to be equally and still more really present to the senses of faith: an abiding Reality to spiritual perception. That manifestation He most strictly connected with the knowledge of His love; and, bringing both into our present prayer, we may say that this is the order of the three: the indwelling of Christ, the manifesting of Himself to faith as indwelling, and the knowledge of His secret, gracious, and all-sufficient love. John xiv. 21.

But we must not forget that this is the exposition of an imaginary text. The Apostle includes all that precedes; but his purpose here is to say that the soul rooted in love, and filled with love in the life, is alone able to understand the blessedness of Christ's love to it, which surpasses every other knowledge than that of experience. It is superfluous to hunt after explanations of these images; it is idle to imagine that their confusion needs to be explained. The words "rooted and grounded" have but one meaning: that love, as the foundation of the Christian character, and as the sap of the Christian life,—or, to add a third figure, "the bond of perfectness,"—is the essential qualification in man for the apprehending of the love of Christ. This alone makes him able, or "fully able,"—for the word is a strong one,—either to comprehend the measures of the love of Christ as displayed in redemption, or to know in experience that love as a personal possession. Thus love here, as a subjective condition, corresponds with the "opening of the eyes of the heart" in the former prayer. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned; and, as all spiritual things are to the saints only the mysteries of Christ's love, the spiritual discernment is the discernment of love. To this we must return, after having

considered briefly the other expressions which are used to express the object of this knowledge.

First, it is the comprehensive knowledge of the essential characteristics of the love of Christ, as it has been unfolded in the previous part of the Epistle. The mystery of redeeming love has its "breadth and length and depth and height:" definitions these of magnitude which, while they suggest infinity, imply directions and regions into which the spiritual thought may trace it, and not without success. As the "ages to come," and "the principalities and powers in heavenly places" have made known to them the "manifold wisdom" of the mystery of Divine grace, so "all saints," the first beneficiaries of these mysteries, are to be their first and most profound and most experimental students. They study, and will for ever study, the breadth of the love that embraces all races; its length which fills eternity; its depth which reaches the lowest abyss of sin and misery; its height, lastly, which reaches to the eternal glorification of the Divine perfections. This is the common study of all saints, who, like the Apostle their representative, know nothing among men, and nothing in heaven, and nothing in the universe, "but Christ, and Him crucified." This fills the circle of their science; absorbs into itself all worthy knowledge, and casts out as vanity all that it cannot absorb. Theology is the only knowledge, and the Cross is the only theology. When we understand this, and hold it fast, we may expatiate as we will on the sacred geometry of the allusion. This knowledge is to be studied in the temple of God; and it finds its own best illustration in that temple, the growth of which, into all the proportions of its perfection, as "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all," is the most glorious illustration of the Divine love known to man. But, after all, we must return to the thought of the boundless extent of the love of Christ, which reaches, in every direction in which can be an object of thought, to infinity.

So far this knowledge has rather reference to the whole company of saints as students, and therefore to the love of Christ as exhausted upon, though never exhausted in, the Church. But when the Apostle goes on to add as a supplement, "and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge," he returns more specially to the individual believer, whose knowledge is not so much that of spiritual perception as that of deep, inward, satisfied, though never satisfied, experience of a love that passeth experience. Here is, of course, what is called a paradox; but one so natural and obvious that it is needless to give it the name. So natural is it that we must not think of a latent comparison between the spiritual knowing which may know the love of Christ and the intellectual *gnosis* which it surpasses. It is the glory of this that it surpasses all knowledge outside of God: in the depths of the Divine essence, where it originated, whence it came, and to which it returns, alone can it be fully known. It surpasses human faculties in every sense, and in whatever light regarded. It is a Divine love manifested in the Incarnate; and every thought and feeling in God must be beyond human understanding. Its deeds and sacrifices, its action and passion, are beyond all human estimate. And—what must never be omitted in this and similar passages—its blessedness as an influence on the human spirit is beyond man's thought to appreciate and describe. What pure and heavenly bliss the human spirit is capable of enjoying in the vision of God, which is only the receiving and returning His love, eternity will prove in full, and time already knows in earnest. The love of Christ is seldom felt, and felt by few, in all its unhindered and unabated power to make the soul happy. But even its beginnings and firstfruits fill the heart with a strange and awful joy, the very first definition of which is that it cannot be described and has no parallel, or, in other words, that it "passeth knowledge." Now when nothing

hinders its flow into the being, when every creaturely affection is renounced, and all the capacities of the redeemed and sanctified spirit are prepared for this heavenly influence, and when, finally, it pleases the Incarnate Life of the soul to put forth more and more of His power to bless, what words can be used concerning the mystery of this communion of love between Him who created the spirit to bless it, and the spirit created to be blessed, than this, that it "surpasseth knowledge"?

The connection between "being rooted and grounded in love" and "being able" to comprehend the love of Christ demands deep consideration. The very same words are used in the earlier prayer to signify the strength infused by the Holy Ghost; and their order in the present prayer is such as to make the connection rather stronger and closer than it appears in the English. There are many reasons why much love at the root of the life strengthens the soul to know Divine love.

First, it removes some effectual impediments to the perception of Divine things generally. Where self reigns, there must needs be a contracted heart in relation to spiritual truth. There is an essential contrariety between self and the heavenly mystery of the Gospel of Christ. The love of redemption cannot be studied even in its elements by the selfish mind; much progress cannot be made in it by the soul that has any residue of self-seeking; but a full and abounding sympathy with it is the happy privilege of those in whom self is dead. Now St. Paul's "rooted and grounded in love" means the extinction of self as a principle at the root of the character. With that extinction vanishes every impediment to the study of infinite self-sacrifice. Till it is gone the love of Christ in His self-devotion to the cross cannot be fully sympathised with or known. Hence the Apostle, in the chapter of the Epistle to the Philippians which deals with the Lord's example of supreme self-renunciation, sets out

with this precept: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:" without His mind in us we cannot approach the sacred mystery. And this is but the echo of our Lord's own words as He drew near to the cross. Not in one saying only, but in the whole course of His instruction, He required perfect self-sacrifice in all who should become His disciples, and showed that both His service and the knowledge of Himself were bound up with the following of His example. Phil. ii. 5.

Once more, a rooted and grounded love quickens the intellectual faculties of the heart to the study of Christ's love, which is simply the whole compass of the redeeming scheme. The Gospel is sometimes called "the word," sometimes "the faith," sometimes "the wisdom" of God. It assumes by turns almost every Divine attribute and name; and here, undoubtedly, it is the glorious work in which the surpassing charity of redemption is manifested that is called "the love of Christ." Now it needs no proof that the love which removes hindrances to the study of redemption quickens the faculties to study it. Love will delight to be for ever exploring its treasures. It gives itself up to the consideration, the deep, fervent, prolonged, and never-weary pondering of Christ, and all the mysteries of His Person and work. Love is the secret interpreter, whom the Holy Spirit is for ever educating in this high knowledge. And the perfection of love in the heart and life is such an habitual transformation into the glorious image of Christ as makes the things of Christ its sum of knowledge.

But, best of all, it is the privilege of the loving soul to be much loved. This is not said precisely in the prayer—for "be able" is not "be privileged"—but it is most certainly implied. It is to this perfect love, that is crucified to every other object, that the Lord manifests Himself. He feeds the love that He inspires with Himself, the constant impress of His own eternal loveliness upon the

soul, thus made strong to be able to comprehend what can never be fully comprehended.

Before passing from these most awful privileges let it be observed that so far the prayer is for the individual. This indwelling is "in your hearts:" not in the common heart of the one mystical Body, the sacred abstraction of the saved mankind. We are to "comprehend with all saints:" in common with each and with all. We must be jealous on this point. Not only is the individual character of these privileges shown, but the language seems further to intimate that it is as common as it is individual: "with all saints," as if it was of the very nature of the saintly relation to rejoice in these experiences of the Divine power. And this indeed is true. There are no blessings in the covenant of grace which are not as free to one as to another of the Christian family. There is no reserved class for whom higher graces are reserved. Nothing is more characteristic of the Epistles of St. Paul, and of the New Testament generally, than the absence of any such reservation. All the highest privileges are thrown open with perfect freedom to the whole society of Christ's people: their experiences are to be enjoyed "with all saints." This fact condemns a sentiment more often felt than expressed; it overthrows a delusion as common as it is unfounded. The salvation is the "common salvation" in all its processes, enjoyments, and hopes. Nothing higher than the religion of this prayer can be conceived out of heaven; but the prayer is offered for every Christian that lives, and is put into the lips of the youngest believer.

"That ye may be filled unto all the fulness of God." This also, like the love of Christ, "passeth knowledge." But it must not be passed over as a mystical winding up of the prayers in words "unlawful to utter" or expound. On a first consideration it might seem to be an unreal and incomprehensible rhapsody. But if we compare it with other Scriptures we find that the Apostle did not intro-

duce this new thought into his petition without a distinct meaning. It may be generally expressed thus: as the first of the three branches of the prayer has reference only to the inner man of the individual Christian, into which the Spirit directs the strength of the Divine grace; and as the second, concerning the inhabitation of Christ, includes both the individuals and the Church "with all the saints;" so the third rises beyond the individual altogether, and uses language which is appropriate only to the universal mystical Body of the Redeemer. This alone can grow into "an holy temple," or be filled up into all the fulness of the Triune God.

We cannot do better than prepare our minds for the interpretation by pondering the other passages in which the saying is used with reference to the Church, as both receiving perfection from her Lord and rendering Him His perfection. The Redeemer Himself gave the central word: "As Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us .... perfected into one." John xvii. 21. The Lord gave this word, and great is the multitude of its illustrations. The nearest echo is in St. Paul's to the Colossians, when he says that as the fulness of the Godhead is in Christ so the fulness of Christ is in His Church: "Ye are complete," or fulfilled, "in Him," which literally means that the plenitude of the Divinity in the one Person of the God-man is "in course of filling up" in the multitudes of His members. So in this Epistle the holy temple grows up into the Lord, increasing—to return to the Colossians—"with the increase of God." The fulness of God is in Christ "out of whose fulness all we have received." Col. ii. 19. John i. 16. But the fulness of Christ is the fulness of God, "for in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." Therefore the body of Christ, when it has received to its last member and in the utmost degree all that the Head has to bestow on His members, has become "filled unto all the fulness of God." Thus as "the

Father" at the outset represents the Holy Trinity, so at the close that Holy Trinity is represented by the final word, "God."

It is plain therefore that it is to the final riches of the glory of grace in the perfected Church that this last clause of the prayer points. It is the Body of Christ that is surely, gradually, blessedly, advancing "unto the fulness of God." But, while this is maintained as necessary to the interpretation of these wonderful words, every Christian has a right to muse upon a certain application of it to himself. We cannot forget that in St. John's words, just
John i. 16. quoted, there is a gracious individuality: "out of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace." In each believer there is the beginning of this last consummation. He is undergoing a transformation which changes him into the image of the Lord—"the same image" in all
2 Cor. iii. 18. —"by the Spirit of the Lord." He never loses his own personality; yet he may be filled with the personality of his Saviour. His "inner man" will be through time and eternity distinctly his own. Christianity knows nothing of a Pantheistic absorption even into Christ. Yet the supreme glory of the Christian experience is to rise towards that conscious self-nothingness which has forgotten the "I" and the "me" for ever.

It is hardly necessary to advert to certain interpretations of these words which they do not fairly permit. The people of God, whether as individuals or as a community, cannot be capable of receiving the fulness of God. This follows from the limitation of the creature. Nor is the Church, any more than its members, ever to be swallowed up in the Divine essence, or to melt into the Deity. This follows from the personal relations of intelligent spirits. It might almost seem as if the language of the prayer was intended to obviate such a semi-Pantheistic meaning as some of the mystics of the Middle Ages found in them. The Divine Trinity is an indwelling Presence in the

Church; and the Church will be so one with God in the Person of the Incarnate Son as to constitute with Him one Body. But the individual will remain a creature of God, a servant of Christ, a temple of the Holy Ghost, for ever. And from the innumerable multitude of these individual spirits will go up, throughout eternity, the Doxology which the Apostle here anticipates.

The Doxology has two remarkable characteristics in harmony with the prayer: first, it preserves the same Trinitarian character, and, secondly, it is stamped with the same impress of sacred hyperbole.

As the tribute to the Divine grace goes back in thanksgiving,—in this sense also, "grace for grace,"—so "the riches of the glory of His grace" go back to Him, in the tribute of glory, "glory for glory." It is to be offered to the "Father of glory," though that name is not expressed: not expressed, because the Apostle's thought is swallowed up in the boundlessness of His power to bless. The standard and measure of that power is, as to us, "beyond what we can ask or think;" as to the Source of it, it is the might of the Holy Ghost, "according to the power that worketh in us." As the Father is not again named, so neither is the Spirit. But His Divine energy is undoubtedly the Object of the Doxology, "the power which worketh." "Christ Jesus" is expressly named, and in such a way as to show that He also is the Object of the Doxology: it is to be offered "in the Church, unto all the generations of the age of the ages;" but offered "in Christ Jesus," as the eternal sphere of this glory. In this life we have access in prayer "through Him;" in the ages of eternity, begun already in the generations of time, we shall "in Him" adore and bless the Triune God. There is a sense indeed in which we both pray and praise, both in time and in eternity, through the Mediator as well as in Him; but this Doxology seems to reach forward to the eternity which shall swallow up the successions of time,

and the "through" Him has become "in" Him for ever. Nothing but this will satisfy the remarkable accumulation of terms here: "unto all the generations of the age of the ages," unto the age or eternity into which all the successions of time flow, and which will be the consummation of all ages. The Church "filled unto the fulness of God" as "the fulness of Christ" will in Him, the incarnate Deity, offer eternal praise, in God and unto God for ever.

The amazing strength of the words, "Who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power which worketh in us" must be left to meditation and experience. The closest exposition of their order only adds to their fulness and vigour: "able to do beyond all things, superabundantly above what we ask with words or think without words." The inexhaustible "riches of grace" are here once more, under a form which shows how the writer was labouring to express his thoughts.

The tribute acknowledges that God's omnipotence is able generally to do more than human thought can conceive of His doing: there is always an endless reserve. This holds good of the works of creation: only "parts of His ways" are seen. It holds good of the operations of grace; though under different conditions. The Divine Agent, the Holy Spirit, is the Administrator of an economy or of a covenant within the charter of which He is doing, can do, and will do, infinitely more than we can ask or think. Otherwise than as self-limited by His own conditions that Omnipotent Agent is powerless: He exerts His power "according to the counsel of His will," and "in all wisdom and prudence."

It declares further, and this is the strength of the encouragement here given, that the boundless possibilities of grace and blessing are in the very line and order in which they have begun: "according to the power now working in us." A greater word, and one more stimulat-

ing to the soul thirsting for God, is not to be found in Scripture. It says plainly that the almighty power is already, and as almighty, at work within us. In the earlier prayer the standard was the operation of God in the resurrection of Christ, and this was said to be "working us-ward." Here the words come nearer to us; they are within us, "even in our mouth and in our heart." "The power that worketh in us" is an energy that has begun its everlasting work, to cease no more for ever; but to go on, if not hindered and let, in a continuity which shall expand into results that surpass any definition. This power worketh onward and onward to infinity. On its glorious way it utterly annihilates the sin of the nature: a blessing this that is above what most Christians ask, and in some respects above what they can think. A state in which no sympathy, even the faintest, is felt with sin, and self is lost in God, and concupiscence, natural to man in the world of sense, ceases to be evil "concupiscence," is by most Christians utterly inconceivable: it is more than they can "think." But our prayer was indited by One who knew that beforehand, knowing "what is in man." It ought to accustom us to dare both in hope and petition what to men is impossible: but not to God, for "with God all things are possible;" and not to faith, for "if thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth."

XIV.

PERSEVERANCE TO THE DAY OF CHRIST.

"And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God."—PHIL. i. 9—11.

THIS Prayer has a special character stamped upon it by its connection with the Thanksgiving that precedes. The Apostle's congratulation of the Philippians, and gratitude on their behalf, had gone so far as to express what might seem to be a confident assurance of their individual salvation in the day of Christ. It was, however, far from his intention to leave on record any such expression of unconditional assurance; on the contrary, here, as everywhere, he is careful to convey a directly opposite sentiment. Between the Thanksgiving and the Prayer there intervenes an intense declaration of his vehement love: a love which, on the one hand, stimulated his good hope concerning them, and made him utter the language of almost absolute anticipation of their eternal welfare; while, on the other, it gives its pathos to the solemn prayer that they might not disappoint his expectation by neglect and unfaithfulness to grace.

"And this I pray:" an unusual preface, which may be explained on the supposition just mentioned. It is as if the Apostle had said: "This is my strong confidence concerning you, that you will be found in the day of the Lord complete in His finished salvation; but this also is with equal earnestness my prayer, that you may not thwart in the meanwhile the operation of His grace." It is in

harmony with such a view that the words "day of Christ" recur so emphatically; being inserted in the very middle of the Prayer, even as they had been placed in the very middle of the Thanksgiving. Confident hope and anxious prayer meet in his human "longing" towards them; and the "day of Christ," which is the goal of his expectation, is also the term of his intercession; not till then will either his hopes be finally fulfilled, or his fears be finally suppressed.

Remembering, then, that the "day of Christ" governs the whole Petition, with every individual clause and word, let us mark the ascending order and cumulative force of the supplications: first, for the steady increase of their love in the knowledge of truth and in the moral tact of its appreciation; secondly, for their perfection, internal and external, of moral character; and, thirdly, for their final acceptance, thus perfected, in the testing day of the Lord.

Like the Thessalonians, the Philippians had been already "taught of God" to love both Himself and one another. The possession of this central grace, the spring of all excellence and the energy of all perseverance, had already been attributed to them. That was the secret of their "fellowship unto the Gospel from the beginning," but the Apostle prays that this grace may abundantly increase in them: not by any arbitrary and absolute effusion into their hearts, but as the result of being fed by knowledge of Divine truth, and of being diligently practised and exercised in the application of that truth to daily life, the love must steadily and equably increase; not, however, as a gift of God simply, but in its human aspect, as a grace based upon knowledge and strengthened by use.

The "knowledge" here spoken of is not the intellectual apprehension or theoretical arrangement of truth in the mind, which, however excellent in itself, is altogether independent of love, and will "pass away" when the body

of truth shall be seen under very different aspects and relations. It is spiritual knowledge, or knowledge of "truth as it is in Jesus;" that is, in its connection with His saving name and our salvation through Him. It is spiritual knowledge, partly as being bound up with our spiritual nature and needs, partly and chiefly as being imparted by the Holy Ghost, through whose influence alone the truth in the fullest and deepest sense of the word can be known. But it is knowledge; knowledge in the strictest sense of the word; for it is imparted and acquired through the sanctified understanding. "Love of the truth" is spoken of as one of the manifestations of the supreme grace; that love quickens the intellect in its study, and gives energy to its pursuits; and, as love enlarges and strengthens the power of attaining religious knowledge, so increasing knowledge feeds and heightens love in return. It should not be forgotten, however, that while St. Paul speaks of "all judgment" he speaks of knowledge as only one. Here is a profound truth which is explained at a later point in the Epistle. All knowledge is summed up in knowing Christ. All truth is now "as the truth is in Jesus." He appropriates, confirms, and seals all truth that He did not bring into the world, and the rest He adds. In Him, as the Object, it may be said that knowing and knowledge meet; the apprehension of Him by faith is the acquisition of the key of all spiritual knowledge. Hence also the deep secret of the increase of love in the increase of knowledge. How can it be otherwise, when the Person of Christ, the "altogether lovely," is at once the substance of all truth and the object of all love!

Eph. iv. 21.

"And in all judgment." This word occurs only in this place, and is carefully chosen by St. Paul to signify the faculty, or rather the exercise, of spiritual discernment: that moral sensitiveness of the renewed mind which makes it quick to perceive the good and the evil in every doctrine, in every practice, in every conflict of seeming duty,

and in all the variety of the contingencies of daily life. The same idea is presented in the Epistle to the Hebrews, though not exactly the same words, where we read of "senses exercised to discern both good and evil." Now, as knowledge is truth stored up in the mind, so judgment is the mind itself applying that knowledge to the endless occasions which arise for distinguishing between what is good and what is evil, what is fair and what is foul, what is better and what is worse, what is to be sought with ardour and what to be shunned with abhorrence. When the Apostle prays that their love may abound in this discernment, he means to ask that it might not, on the one hand, be a blind and sentimental emotion, and that, on the other, it might be trained as by a kind of instinct to decide aright in every emergency. As we train the bodily senses of sight and touch and hearing to discriminate accurately, and bring them by exercise, voluntary or involuntary, to exquisite precision and almost unfailing accuracy, so our love must be trained to be itself a universal spiritual sense, at once the eye and the ear and the hand of the heart, seeing, and hearing, and touching, in things Divine, with a sure and delicate feeling that seldom needs correction. This gift of the practical life is one that must be acquired by sedulous culture and use; but, as it depends upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit, whose never-failing influence consecrates the use of all our faculties, it is asked for by the Apostle as a grace from God.

Heb. v. 14.

The next words make all this still clearer: "That ye may approve things that are excellent," words which describe the operation of this knowledge and discrimination, not so much in the life—we have not yet come to that—as in the mind itself. It is the precious insight of love which, using its knowledge and exercising its tact, distinguishes always and in every case what is more excellent, and at once approves of it. St. Paul elsewhere says

of love that it is "the fulfilment of the law:" not only is it the strength of obedience to all commandment, it is also the inward legislator that often tells us what is the commandment when outward legislation fails. In this sense also "charity never faileth;" that is, true love, disciplined by knowledge, will always certify to us what our duty is; will enable us to distinguish what is true, and pure, and just and good, from all possible counterfeits of these qualities. A warm heart, and strong affections, and even sound enthusiasm, often lead astray; but not so the well-instructed principle of love to God and man. The Apostle
1 Cor. xiii. gives the Corinthians the most striking illustration of this which the Bible contains. The praise of charity in that hymn is little more than the praise of its marvellous discrimination. Almost all that can be imagined to look like religion, without being religion, is there condemned by the sure decision of charity, the judge among the graces. To sum up all, St. Paul implores for us the Divine grace, and we must implore it for ourselves, that we may be able to bring an intelligent and thoughtful love so to bear upon the whole economy and order of life that it may be to us an internal monitor, instructing us always what to believe and what to reject, what to do and what to shun, what to leave behind us as unworthy and what to make the mark of our supreme pursuit. An internal monitor: no more. Not an unwritten Bible; not a light within releasing us from the light without; not a guide leading us to salvation "without the Word;" but the sacred cunning of enlightened love, receiving and using with more and more skilful care and careful skill the infallible monitions of the Holy Ghost, whose elect and favourite instrument within the human heart is love.

From the regulating principle the Prayer now passes to the perfect character, as established in the world, under the guidance and control of enlightened love. St. Paul, whose sense of symmetry never forsakes him in this

part of his writings, selects two terms that exhibit the whole compass of godliness under two aspects, inward and outward, which he first presents in their separation, and then unites: he asks that his converts may be "sincere" in heart, "without offence" in life, and, as to both, "filled with the fruit of righteousness."

The first of these words, "sincere," signifies that unspotted, flawless simplicity of heart and intention which is able to endure every test that can be applied to it. The last and perfect test of every character is the Eye of God, which penetrates every secret. What the sun is in nature, the great Detecter, the all-seeing Face of God is in the religious life. And the sublime petition of our Prayer is that the Philippians might be so entirely actuated by love, distinguishing and rejecting with abhorrence all evil, that the most rigid scrutiny of the Omniscient should find in their hearts no admixture of corrupt motive. Those whom God sees thus pure in heart have it as their reward in their purity to see God. This Divine simplicity of purpose and aim and thought and desire, this lovely integrity of spirit in the midst of the manifold and all-pervading corruptions of the world, is a gift of God, the blessing of His indwelling Spirit on a sincere desire to approve itself pure in His sight. It is a pearl of great price, this of sacred simplicity! If any quality or attribute of the religious spirit might seem to come direct from God, as His gift, it is this. With regard to nothing does our corrupted nature, practised in evil, appear so impotent. Those who have vanquished much, and successfully pursued many things, often despair of this. Hence it is made so impressively the matter of prayer: such cleanness of heart is the express creation of God. But in this, as in all other things that pertain to man's internal discipline and perfection, there is no gift of God that does not take the form of a consecration of our own effort. By the habitual study of our motives, or rather

Matt. v. 8.

by habitual watchfulness over the unity and simplicity of the one motive that must govern all, we come to detect every evil admixture. And there is but a step between the detection of an aim that is deliberately and heartily renounced, and its suppression in the heart by the power of the Holy Ghost. He that can say, "I hate every false way," may confidently cry, "Unite my heart to fear Thy name."

"Without offence" may mean either "not giving offence," or "not stumbling." But, inasmuch as love essentially has reference to the good of others, and a perfect character is one that never fails to recommend religion and make it lovely, it seems better to understand the Prayer as asking that the Philippians might be preserved, through the blessing of God on the wise solicitude of charity, from doing anything that should hinder the salvation of their fellow-Christians or their fellow-sinners. The New Testament lays great stress upon this: far more than we too often, in our refined selfishness, suppose. It is, viewed under one aspect, the very perfection of the Christian character. As such it must have, on the one hand, a very large, and on the other a restricted, interpretation. The Christian, actuated by the reasonableness of love, is supposed to do nothing that may of itself be hurtful to his neighbour's soul. That is, his thoughtful charity must show its tact in this, that his conduct shall at once rebuke the sin of others, and direct them to the beauty of holiness; that he shall at once contradict the evil around him, and recommend the opposite good; that he shall by his words and works make iniquity hateful, and yet constrain the ungodly to respect and admire holiness in himself. It must show its tact, not only in abstaining from every such folly as would disgrace religion, but also in saving his religion as far as possible from the misconstruction of those who are opposed and prejudiced. Beyond this, the discretion of his charity need not go.

For there is a necessary limitation. The supreme Pattern made religion past all language lovely, both by His words and by His example; He could say, "Which of you convinceth Me of sin?" but His sad cry was, half in protest and half in appeal, "Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me!" The disciple is not greater than his Lord; and the love which failed in Him will fail also in us. We may do nothing but good in some cases; and yet our good may be evil, and only evil spoken of. The utmost that St. Paul's Prayer can embrace is expressed, in this as in many other cases, by his own example. He would renounce almost everything that touched his own desire rather than make his brother to offend. But this was not an absolute rule; for there was a point at which he cried, "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment." But it was his constant exercise, the holy education of his practical love, to have a "conscience void of offence toward God," that is, to be perfectly "sincere" before Him, and "toward man," that is, to place no real stumbling-block or obstacle in the way of his neighbour's salvation.

Jno. viii. 46.

Matt. xi. 6.

When the Prayer proceeds to the "fruit of righteousness" it completes the picture of this perfection at the same time that it explains more fully the meaning of "sincere and without offence." It is another of the Apostle's unique phrases; and, as such, strong, deep, and suggestive. It supplicates that the Philippians might be abundant in the spiritual life, all the manifestations of a renewed and righteous character being amply exhibited in them. The term "righteousness" is one with which St. Paul supposes his readers to be familiar. It is neither the righteousness that is imputed to faith alone, nor the implanted life of regeneration alone, but that new moral righteousness before God which is "by Jesus Christ," which comes to us through our union with Him, which disparts into justification and regeneration in the lan-

guage of theology, but unites here in the one great word "fruit." The fruit, or produce of the new method of making us right in Christ, is the entire compass of godliness in all its tempers, acts, and offices. It is more than probable that the Apostle wrote "fruit," with this idea of their unity strongly impressed, and not "fruits." Be this as it may, there can be no doubt that the strongest emphasis lies on the word "filled," which has, throughout the New Testament, a meaning that it obtained on the day of Pentecost, a meaning that ought never to be softened down or explained away. It sounds out clearly the note of Christian perfection, attainable because prayed for, prayed for because attainable. It leaves no room for the notion of any necessary defect in the religious life. It is in harmony with the entire current of Scriptural testimonies, which speak of our being "filled with the Spirit," "filled unto all the fulness of God," and, as the middle term between these, of our being "filled with grace." Those who understand the terms of this Prayer literally, and with that understanding offer it to God for themselves, may count it their privilege to be so grafted into Christ as to lose the very sap and life of the natural tree, to be so replenished with the life flowing from Him as to bear, throughout the spiritual branches of their new nature, only the fruit of righteousness, and that fruit in abundance. Only that fruit: for the Stem and the branches are one, and holiness is common to Christ and to us. That fruit in abundance: for the fulness of the Spirit of Christ in the Christian is "without measure" according to our created capacity. And all "to the glory and praise of God." St. Paul had heard of the Saviour's words: "Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit." He had also heard of that other word: "I have chosen you and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain." Combining the two, he prays that the ample growth of holiness,

Eph. v. 17.
Eph. iii. 19.
Jno. xv. 8.
Jno. xv. 16.

springing from the husbandry of Christ, whose tillage is the infusion of His own enriching life, might appear in the lives of his converts, to the glory and praise of the common Father, the Head of the mediatorial economy. The holy lives of Christians pay their tribute to the "glory" of the Divine character, and they "praise" the manifestation of the Divine grace in Christ. Viewed with respect to God, our practical religion is only the reflection of His holiness, as produced in us by the Spirit of His Incarnate Son. Viewed with respect to ourselves, our holiness is a ceaseless psalm that acknowledges His power and fidelity to His covenant of grace.

Lastly, we must go back to that central word, "the day of Christ," which really completes the meaning of the Prayer, though not actually forming its last words. It must be noted that there is now a slight, but very important, change in the expression. It is not now "until," but "unto," or rather "for," or "with reference to," the day of Christ. In the Thanksgiving to which reference has again and again been made, the Apostle fixed his hope on their continuance in the good work of personal religion until the great and decisive day, when, and when only, that good work would be finally accomplished. But now in his Prayer he trusts that by the grace of God they will so live that, whenever called hence, their purity of spirit and offencelessness of life, and abundance of practical righteousness, would be found unto honour and praise in the testing day. Jesus the Judge will in that day acknowledge the purity which He now approves; will confirm and reward the righteousness which He now creates. The Apostle does not pray that they may be kept without sin and in the abundance of righteousness until death, though that is his meaning. It is never absent from his thoughts that all Christian integrity, sealed in one sense by death, is to be re-examined, and finally, with the whole universe as witness, ratified in the great day. Death is here, as

almost everywhere in St. Paul's writings when he is speaking of the future in the language of consolation, swallowed up in the surpassing glory of the Lord's day. Both in the thanksgiving and in the Prayer, death might, without much impropriety, be substituted for the "day of Christ." But the change would rob both of their highest glory. The Thanksgiving speaks as if believers were working their way to the Lord's presence; the Prayer speaks as if the Lord were on His way to His saints, to test and reward and consummate their holiness.

Finally, the lesson which it is the Apostle's intention to leave lingering in our thoughts is this, that there is no guarantee of the good work being performed or consummated within us at that day, save as we are found by that day, or by death should death anticipate that day, pure and filled with the fruits of the new life. The Prayer is in this sense, let it once more be said, the counterpart of the Thanksgiving. They mutually illustrate and supplement each other. Those who are tempted by their creed or by their indolence to rely on the supposed necessity that a salvation once begun must be finally accomplished, are reminded by the tone and by the words of the prayer that without their inward and outward holiness that blessed issue shall not be attained. There is no such gift or grace of perseverance as certain schools of theology are fond of imagining and placing in their summaries of the covenanted blessings of the Gospel. On the other hand, the Prayer derives a wonderful glow and energy from the Thanksgiving which is its background. The good work shall, as surely as God liveth, be brought to a blessed consummation, if we seek with all our hearts the fulness of our Saviour's gift of righteousness. We may exult in the most unbounded reliance on the final accomplishment of the Divine will IN the day of Christ if FOR the day of Christ we prepare, through Divine grace, perfect purity of heart, and the abundant fruit of holiness. On the whole, the

combination of thanksgiving and prayer at the commencement of this Epistle is rather intended for encouragement than for warning. To the sincere souls that long for perfect sincerity, to the regenerate members of Christ's mystical body who loathe as the apples of Sodom every remaining fruit of evil that gives evidence that the sinful sap still flows, to the humble saints who believe in the promise that makes the fulness of Christ's Spirit their own as surely as it is Christ's, there is nothing but consolation and good hope whether in the Thanksgiving or the Prayer. They may dismiss from their minds, as if they existed not, all controversies as to the perpetuity of grace in the elect. They have only to live every day as if it were, what indeed it is, the preparation of the Lord's Sabbath. So, when that day of Christ's glorious appearing comes, which is also the day of judgment, the assurance of hope shall give place to the assurance of eternal possession. The Lord shall separate His own from all others, and seal upon their hearts the eternal impossibility of losing His grace or forfeiting their life in Him. He also shall, in His judicial capacity "distinguish things that differ," and "approve the things that are excellent;" and we, finally approved and accepted, shall share and reflect the glory of the Lord for ever.

XV.

THE EVERLASTING COVENANT.

"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that Great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."—HEBREWS xiii. 20, 21.

Two things occur to the mind on reading this prayer, as it closes the Epistle to the Hebrews; first, the new style of phraseology which it introduces; and, secondly, the propriety with which it sums up the essence of the previous discourse.

As to the former: it is remarkable that almost every word, certainly every clause, is a variation on the current language of the Epistle. The invocation of "the God of peace;" the prominence given to the resurrection of Christ; the name of Him who was "brought again from the dead," "that Great Shepherd of the sheep;" the relation of His resurrection to the "everlasting covenant;" the new application of "make you perfect," so different from the "perfection" of previous chapters; the reference to the interior operation which works "what is well-pleasing in His sight;" the doxology to Jesus Christ,—all are expressions of a different tone from what might naturally have been expected. The whole prayer is constructed of elements that would have been in most perfect keeping with the Epistle to the Romans, for instance, or that to the Galatians. One thing, however, is plain, that it is precisely in St. Paul's style. And, if it does not force upon us the conclusion that he was the writer of the Epistle, it

Heb. xiii. 20.

suggests at least that he made it his own by this final seal of authentication. Moreover, it serves also to form a link of connection between this Levitical-Christian treatise and the other writings of the New Testament, from which, in other respects, it diverges so widely. But this is a question of the secret history of the literature of the new covenant, into which it is not our province here to enter.

On the other hand, such a final intercessory supplication most strikingly and pertinently winds up the whole treatise. In this light "the blood of the everlasting covenant" is its central theme, illustrating both what precedes and what follows. The virtue of that blood is the secret of all that had been said; and here it is reintroduced as the ratification of the redeeming work of the Saviour who died and rose again, and as the ground of the sanctification unto holiness of the whole flock of the "Great Shepherd." But the order of these remarks will do fuller justice to the prayer if we consider the God who is invoked, the petition that is offered, and the doxology that closes.

"The God of peace" is a new name in this Epistle; and most appropriate here for two reasons. First, it does honour to the ancient Israelite benediction, and would touch the inmost hearts of these Hebrew Christians. "The Lord give thee peace" had been for ages the closing words of the Divine blessing on His people; and the Apostle who, as we have seen, had, on the Romans, and Corinthians, and Thessalonians, and Philippians invoked "the God of peace," would not omit to do so when writing to his brethren in the bonds of the former covenant. His new token "Grace be with you all!" will presently follow, but only as supplementing the old one, never to be superseded. But, secondly, the peace of the Old Testament has received a deeper meaning in the New, and this invocation connects it with the fully revealed economy of reconciliation, "THE PEACE" of which Christ is the Mediator. "He is our Peace:" the Author and Finisher

Numb. vi. 26.

Eph. ii. 14.

of the restored harmony between God and His sinful creatures. He has brought to full accomplishment the ancient purpose of which the God of the old economy spake: "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end." The last "expected end" has come, and all the Divine thoughts are disclosed. Simeon's prophecy had a heavenly as well as an earthly fulfilment, "that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed:" in Christ is a glorious revelation of the thoughts of heaven and earth. From age to age had Jehovah linked His awful name with the progressive manifestation of His purposes. To Abraham, "Jehovah-Jireh;" to Moses, "Jehovah-Nissi;" to Gideon, "Jehovah-Shalom," THE LORD OF PEACE; to Jeremiah, "The Lord our Righteousness;" to Ezekiel, "The Lord is there." But this is the consummation of all. "The God of peace" is a name that enfolds and unfolds all the treasures of the covenant of atonement or reconciliation for sinful man. This Epistle had dwelt upon the great sacrifice rather as an expiation of sin and propitiation of holy wrath than as a reconciliation between God and man; the latter view having been exhibited in the Epistles to the Romans and Corinthians. But this final name connects the present with the former Epistles, and gives the one perfect result of Christ's work: that in which it finds its "expected end."

Jer. xxix. 11.

Luke ii. 35.

Gen. xxii. 14. Ex. xvii. 15. Judg. vi. 24. Jer. xxiii. 6. Eze. xlviii. 35.

But the relation of the God of peace to the Redeemer is affectingly brought out in this invocation. Though this is done, however, only in a parenthetical manner, the novelty of the words and thoughts demands our attention: first, to the gracious name given to the Redeemer; secondly, to the connection between that name and His resurrection; and thirdly, to the security of His people as thus guaranteed.

We have not yet had the name "Shepherd," as applied

to Christ, in the course of these prayers. Nor has it occurred in our Epistle. But the Old-Testament treasury would not have given up the very best of its "things old" concerning our Lord if this had been omitted. It was one among the ancient names of the Covenant-Angel of Jehovah, the Son who should be manifest in the flesh. It was the "Angel of His presence" who "brought them up out of the sea with the Shepherd of His flock:" that is, the "Great Shepherd" who by Moses the under-shepherd led them up from Egypt, "to make Himself an everlasting name" when He should fulfil this type. These and many other prophecies our Lord remembered when He called Himself the "Good Shepherd" who gave "His life for the sheep." How dear to His heart was this name appeared when He was approaching the cross. Among His last remembrances of the prophetic word was that most pathetic one of Zechariah: "Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, and against the man that is My Fellow, saith the Lord of hosts: smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered." And as the Lord remembered these words, and graciously added to them, "After I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee," words which under a first literal fulfilment veiled the fulfilment of which our prayer speaks, and in which we all rejoice, so the Apostle remembers them here: "That brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that Great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant."

Isa. lxiii. 9, 11.

Isa. lxiii. 11, 12.

Jno. x. 11.

Zech. xiii. 7.

Mat. xxvi. 31, 32.

Heb. xiii. 20.

If He was the "Good Shepherd" because He laid down His life for the sheep, He is the "Great" Shepherd because, in the virtue of the covenant blood, He is raised up to be their Lord and Ruler for ever. His greatness in this Epistle is twofold. It is the dignity of His eternal unity and equality with God, whence He is the "Great High Priest." And it is the dignity with which He is invested in His incarnate Person as raised from the

Heb. iv. 14.

dead. He is the "Great Shepherd" in this latter sense, in which, as the subordinate of the Father, though His Fellow, He was smitten to death, and then "brought again from the dead." In the eternal unity of the Godhead He had power to lay down His own life, and had
Jno. x. 18. "power to take it again." But, in the economy of mediation, "this commandment He received of the Father." And His greatness as a Shepherd lies in this, that He is both raised and exalted to administer a covenant which the Divine virtue of His blood hath made everlasting, "ordered in all things, and sure." Thus is fulfilled the
Isa. lv. 3, 4. word of the inferior covenant: "Hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David. Behold, I have given Him for a Witness to the people, a Leader and Commander to the people:" a Leader and Commander: that is, a Shepherd to guide and to rule; and "Great" because His rising from the dead had declared Him "to be the Son of God with power," a Divine Ruler in human nature, bearing the human name of David, but Immanuel also, "God with us." He is Great in the strength of His most precious blood, which has been glorified throughout the Epistle, and is now more exceedingly glorious at the end. It makes us great, and He is great in its infinite
Acts xx. 28. Heb. ix. 12. Lu. i. 32. power. By it He hath "purchased" the Church; for by it "He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest;" great because of that name, and great also because of the infinite preciousness of the blood which He shed upon the cross, the worth of which at once satisfied and vanquished death, and confers eternal life on all the sheep who follow Him.

"The sheep" is a new name for the Church of Christ in this Epistle. But the names of His people follow the names of their Head; and this is the elect name which

distinguishes from the rest of the world those who follow the Lamb, who is their Shepherd in virtue of the atonement. They are "the sanctified," "the brethren," "the perfected," "the heirs of the everlasting testament," "the children," "the people sanctified by His blood," "the holy brethren," of the former part of the Epistle. Here they are the flock gathered together out of the Dispersion of sin. They follow Jesus in the power of His resurrection, and are led by Him to their everlasting inheritance. Their union with the Shepherd as a flock is guaranteed to eternity: our Lord was "brought again from the dead" as "the Great Shepherd of the sheep," and without His sheep He is not a Shepherd. His greatness is their security; for He without them will not be made perfect. His blood is the "blood of an everlasting covenant:" a covenant of peace, a covenant of the Lord of life with death, a covenant which is also a testament of an endless inheritance. In this prayer are the echoes of that glorious prediction in the prophecy of the smitten Shepherd: "He shall speak peace unto the heathen; and His dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth. As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water;" out of the pit of sin and the pit of Hades. This is the virtue of the precious blood, that it avails to "perfect for ever them that are sanctified." He who descended to the pit of death carried with Him the sins of His people, to be brought back again no more for ever. "If one died for all, then were all dead." But He was brought again from the death He sought and found. And we are assured that He was "brought back again," not for His sake who died,—for He could not be holden of death,—but for our eternal security. In Him we were "brought back again from the dead."

Heb. ii. 11.

Heb. iii. 1.

Zech. ix. 10, 11.

2 Cor. v. 14.

Are then the sheep eternally secure, in the sense that every one who hath ever received the sprinkling of the

precious blood and taken any steps in the following of the Great Shepherd is infallibly to be guided to everlasting life? Most assuredly not. In all who are inheritors of the inheritance to which the Redeemer guides His risen people, the prayer that follows must be fulfilled. It is an intercessory petition for their perfection in all good works and for the interior accomplishment in them of all the Divine good pleasure, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. These prayers, in almost the same words, we have had before. We shall not need to do more than show their connection with the sacrificial language of this Epistle.

The general prayer, which includes the other two branches, is, that God would "make you perfect through Jesus Christ." This is the true order, as it gives the great counterpart of the previous exhibition of the work accomplished in Christ Himself. There are in this Epistle two words for perfection: one referring to the perfection which results from the finished work of the Redeemer, who by
Heb. x. 14. His one offering hath "perfected for ever them that are sanctified," or in course of sanctification. As our Lord Himself was "made perfect through sufferings," that is, was perfected as a sacrificial atonement by suffering, so all who are joined to Him are once for all made perfect externally through the application of His sacrifice: their Levitical acceptance in the temple is perfect. Of this perfection the pledge is found in the "bringing back Jesus from the dead." But now the word is significantly changed, and the prayer runs: "May He who accepts you as perfected through the finished sacrifice, dispose and order your souls perfectly to do His will by Himself doing within you what is well pleasing through the same Jesus Christ."
Heb. v. 9. He is "the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him." But to obey Him is to obey God, that is, to do His will. Who can help thinking of the impressive connection between this doing of the will of God on the

part of Christ's flock, and the doing of the will of God by the Shepherd which rendered that possible? "Lo, I come to do Thy will!" "By the which will we have been saved:" from sin, that is, and death. We also must use the same words, "through Jesus Christ," by His Spirit, and in imitation of His example; and every one of us say for himself, "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O my God!" Here, then, we have at the close of the Levitical Epistle, which ascribes to Christ the sole prerogative of rendering the sinner and his offering acceptable, the same inculcation of the necessity of individual, personal good works which we find in the forensic Epistle to the Romans. Reckoned righteous through faith, we must be made righteous also. Perfectly accepted on the altar for Christ's sake, we must have all acceptableness wrought in our heart and life.

We may look at the negative and the positive side of this. The word "make perfect" seems to indicate the former, as it signifies the entire deliverance of the soul from everything that would hinder the complete performance of the will of God. We have seen in one of the prayers for the Corinthians that the same word has reference to the perfect corporate readiness of the people to holiness; and some would find the same allusion here. But it is better to think only of the perfect inward readiness which the grace of God works in many ways: by removing every impediment and uniting the heart in the one service of God. The effect of this secret disposition towards the integrity of obedience, that whole-hearted consecration to duty on which the Scriptures lay such stress, is the doing God's will "in every good work." God's will is one; and the word "make you perfect" here cannot be better expounded than as signifying the removal of a divided heart: "unite my heart to fear Thy Name!" But when the heart is one, and "made fit and meet" for the Divine will, then from the unity flows a better multiplicity, that which dispreads the obedience "in every good work." Ps. lxxxvi. 11.

But there is no will of God which is not simply His good pleasure; the perfect law of the Gospel is simply what pleases God; and the sublime perfection of the religious character is simply to reflect the Divine image, "partakers of His holiness." The prayer has here a very beautiful change of form and play on its own sacred words. The God of holiness is asked to do within us what we are doing without: His own good pleasure. "That which is pleasing before Him" is the sum and substance of all spiritual beauty of holiness. The thought presented is one with which the Scripture has made us familiar everywhere from the beginning. The work of God's hands must reflect His own perfection; in the renewal of the soul He is undoing the work of sin, and doing what must please Himself, and be "very good." And it is obvious that the formation of a holy character must be absolutely the work of God within us. Whatever we contribute is but the performance in His strength of individual good works, the formation of holy habits, and the habitual outgoing of our holy aspirations. To rid and deliver the soul from the relics and vestiges of what God cannot smile upon—and nothing short of this is the burden of the prayer—is necessarily the act of Divine grace alone. We may, by Divine help, "do every good work:" we must, indeed, for the indwelling Saviour only directs our working; and it is a perilous though lovely enthusiasm of the mystics to speak of God absorbing our faculties and working through our energies. He makes us meet, and apt, and "ready to every good work:" no more. But the formation of His own most holy image in us is a different matter. The working in us of all that He can love, delight in, and bless, which implies the utter and absolute removal of all that could awaken His slightest displacence—that is, of Himself, through Jesus Christ alone,—is the last achievement of His grace on earth. And happy are they who know this. Blessed is he that

Heb. xii. 10.

believeth that His grace is equal to the accomplishment of this: for in him also there shall be a performance of those things which are believed.

But minute analysis fails here. We must let the whole of the heavenly prayer sink into our hearts and melt into them as the last expression of that "mystery of godliness," which is in us as in Christ "God manifest in the flesh." Our doing and His doing are blended into one word, never elsewhere employed in the same service. None by searching can find out the secret of the One Person who is God and man. None by searching can find out the secret of the one holiness which in us is all Divine and all human. "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." The prayer commits all to God, whose omnipotence "brought again from the dead" the Great Shepherd; it is also a most fervent exhortation to us to engage all our faculties in the perfect performance of His will. Phil. ii. 13.

But when the question is of glorying, there is no longer any blending of the human and the Divine. All is "through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory, to the ages of ages." Here, however, the superfluous question may be urged: Is the doxology offered to Christ, the Author and Finisher of our perfection, both external and internal; or is it offered to the God of peace to whom the prayer was addressed? In this case, if ever, we may reconcile the different expositions by uniting them. They must be united. The natural order of the words assigns the doxology to Jesus Christ, as indeed the tenour of the whole Epistle exhibits His right to it. It is rounded with the Divine dignity of "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." Certainly, if our Lord Jesus is not the Eternal Son as well as the Great Shepherd, the doxology could not be His; for glory belongeth unto God alone. But it is as plain as any written truth can be, throughout the Epistle, that the Leader of the Christian

flock, and the Mediator of their peace, and the Provider of their sanctification, and the Pattern of their perfection, is God. Then this glory given to Him is not first taken from God. "God is glorified in Him." But He is glorified as the Father: "Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son also may glorify Thee." And this mutual glorification is through the Holy Ghost: "He shall glorify Me." During the present dispensation the glorification of the Father in the Son and of the Son in the Father is becoming more and more perfectly revealed. While God is glorified, or the Father glorified, as the Head of redemption, the Son is also glorified as Himself the perfected Redeemer. Meanwhile the Holy Ghost is glorified in the reflection of His holiness in the Church. His work is to change the believing flock "from glory to glory." While He is accomplishing this, His own name is glorified, both in itself and in the unity of the Three-One. When the redeeming purposes are all accomplished, God, the Triune God, shall be all in all. Till then, we may name the name of our Great Shepherd with the love of adoration and say, "To Whom be glory for ever. Amen."

John xvii. 1.

2 Cor. iii. 18.

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